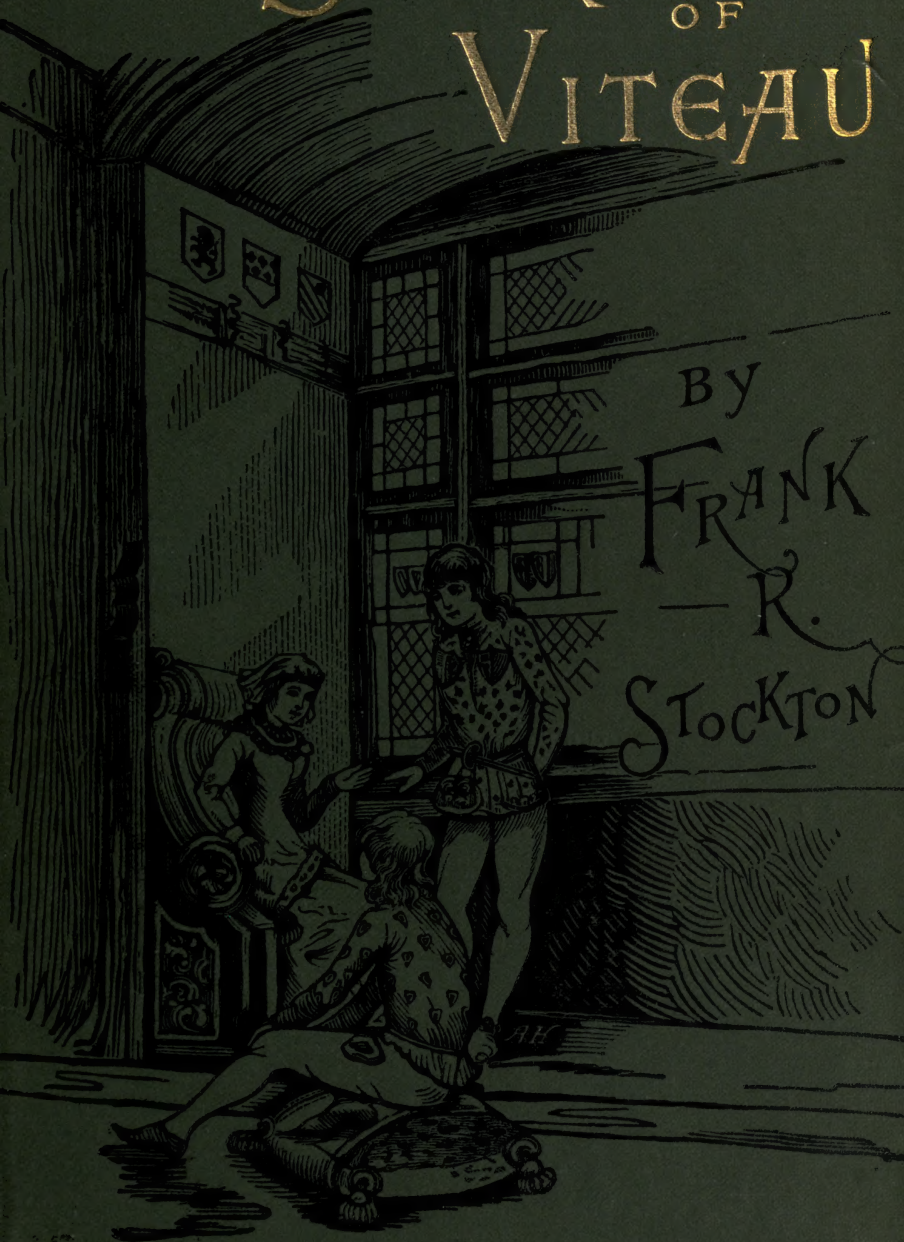


THE STORY OF VITEAU


BY
FRANK
— R.
STOCKTON



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RAYMOND, LOUIS, AND THE PAGE RETURN TO VITEAU.

THE
STORY OF VITEAU

BY
FRANK R. STOCKTON

AUTHOR OF "A JOLLY FELLOWSHIP," "THE FLOATING PRINCE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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The Story of Viteau.

CHAPTER I.

BY the side of a small stream, which ran through one of the most picturesque portions of the province of Burgundy, in France, there sat, on a beautiful day in early summer, two boys, who were brothers.

They had been bathing in the stream, and now, having dressed, they were talking together on the bank.

Raymond, the elder, was about fourteen years old, and his brother Louis was some eighteen months younger. In form and feature, and in general disposition and character, they were not unlike many of the boys of our day, and yet these two young fellows lived more than six hundred years ago. They were dressed in simple tunics, one green, one brown, and wore short breeches, dark-colored stockings, and rather clumsy shoes.

The two brothers were very busily engaged in conversation, for they had a great deal to say to each other, and not much time to say it in. On the next day Louis was going away from home, to be gone a long, long time.

Raymond and Louis were the sons of the Countess of Viteau, whose chateau stood on a little eminence about half a mile away. Their father, the Count of Viteau, had been one of the most steadfast adherents and supporters of the Duke of Burgundy, in his endeavors to maintain the independence of his dukedom against the claims of the French crown, and had fallen in one of the battles between the Duke's followers and the army of the Regent, Queen Blanche, who, in those days, ruled France in the name of her son, the young King, Louis IX., afterward known as Louis the Just, or St. Louis.

The Duke's forces had been defeated, Burgundy had been compelled to acknowledge the supremacy of the French crown, and peace reigned in the kingdom.

The widowed Countess of Viteau now found herself the sole protector and guardian of her two boys. Fortunately, she had a large estate, but even this added to her cares and responsibilities, and rendered her less able to attend to what she had intended should be the aim and business of her life—the education of her sons.

Education, in those days, did not mean what it does

now. The majority of the people, even of the upper classes, were not educated at all, some of the lords and barons being unable to write their names. Printing had not been invented; all books were in manuscript, and were scarce and valuable. Most of the learning, such as it was, had been, for a long time, confined to the monks and priests; but, in the era in which our two boys lived, people had begun to give more attention to general education, and there were schools in some of the large cities which were well attended, and where the students of that day were taught grammar, logic, rhetoric, music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy, although their studies in most of these branches were not carried very far. The school of Paris was one of the most celebrated of these institutions.

The Countess of Viteau was among the few ladies of the time who really cared for an education beyond that which included the small number of accomplishments then considered necessary to persons of high position. When quite a young woman, she had learned all that the priests, one or more of whom generally lived in her father's house, could teach her, and afterward, when her sons were old enough, she made it her personal business to attend to their studies. Some things she taught them herself, and, for other branches, she employed such men of know-

ledge—almost always members of some order of the clergy—as could be obtained.

But now the time had arrived when the customs of the day demanded that one of her sons, at least, should leave her to receive an education of another sort, and her younger boy was to be sent away to the castle of the Count de Barran, an old friend and fellow-soldier of her husband, to be taught, as most of the boys of his station were taught, the arts and usages of knighthood and chivalry. Raymond would also be a knight, but his mother wished him to be more than that. He would succeed to the rank and estate of his father, and she hoped that he would not only be a nobleman and a soldier, but a scholar. When he should leave her to go to the school at Paris,—and it was for this school that she was now endeavoring to prepare him,—he would live with one of his relatives, by whom he would be instructed in the noble duties of chivalry. His mother felt sure that his studies at the school and his knightly exercises would not interfere with each other.

“Only one more day,” said Raymond, “and then it will seem so strange here without you, Louis.”

“But it will be ever so much stranger for me,” said Louis, “for I shall be without everybody. I have never seen a single soul of the castle people, excepting the Count de Barran, and it is so long

since he was here that I have almost forgotten him. He was a big, stout man, and that's all I know about him."

"You might as well have never seen him," said Raymond, "for he is not stout, and he is not big. He's a tall, thin man, and, I think, a kind one. But I expect you soon will know everybody."

"Or they will know me," said Louis, "which will be the same thing. I know I shall have lively times. Let me see: For a year and a half I shall be a page. There must be ever so many ways for the pages, especially if there are a good many of us, to have royal fun. And then, when I am fourteen, I shall be a squire. I think I shall not like that so much, excepting for the fighting part."

"Fighting!" exclaimed his brother. "You'll have none of that."

"Oh yes, but I shall have," returned Louis. "Bar-ran has always been fighting, ever since I heard of him; and if he does his duty by me, he is bound to take me with him to the wars."

"But the wars are all over," said Raymond. "You know that as well as I do."

"Oh, there'll be more," said Louis, laughing. "There is sure to be trouble of some kind before I'm fourteen. And, if there are any wars, you must come to them. It wont do to be spending all your time here, with priests and books."

"Priests and books!" exclaimed Raymond. "I don't expect to spend half my time with them. I shall ride and fence, and tilt and hunt quite as much as you will, or even more, I doubt not. But I can do all that, and be a scholar too."

"I'd like well enough to be a scholar," said Louis, "if it were not so much trouble. Just to learn to write, like the monks who make our books, must take years! I tell you, Raymond, it would be time wasted for me."

"No doubt of that," said his brother, laughing. "You would never have the patience to write out all the pages of a book, even if you could do it so well that people could read it. If you can do so much as write me a letter from the castle, to tell me how you find things there, and what happens to you, I shall be glad enough."

"I never did write a letter," said Louis, "but I feel quite sure that I could do it. The trouble would be for you to read it."

"That's true;" said Raymond, "but I will do my best to read, if you will do your best to write."

"Did not our mother tell you to ask me this?" said Louis, turning towards his brother with a smile.

"She did," answered Raymond.

"I thought it sounded like her," said Louis. "She greatly wants me to read and write; and, for

her sake, and yours, too, Raymond, I'll try a letter. But is not that Bernard, over in the field?"

"Yes, it is," said Raymond. "He is training a young falcon for me."

"For you!" cried Louis, jumping up. "I did not know that. Let us go down to him."

"I did not know it, either," said his brother, rising, "until yesterday. Bernard is going to teach me to fly the bird as soon as it is trained."

"And I am going away to-morrow," cried Louis. "It is too bad!"

The boys now ran down to the field, where a tall, broad-shouldered man, dressed in a short, coarse jacket of brown cloth, with tight breeches of the same stuff, was walking towards them. He bore on his left hand a large falcon, or goshawk, a bird used in that day for hunting game of various kinds.

"Ho, Bernard!" cried Louis, "how is it I never heard that you were training that bird? I should have liked to watch you all the time."

"That is the reason you were not told," said Bernard, who had been the squire of the late Count, and was now a well-trusted member of the household of Viteau.

"If you had known what I was about," he continued, "you would have done nothing but watch me, and therefore it was that your good mother told me to keep the matter from you. It takes a long time

and a world of trouble to train a hawk, especially one that was nearly full-grown when caught, as this one was. Those taken from their nests are far easier to manage."

"But he is trained now, isn't he?" said Louis. "Why not try him to-day? Just one flight, good Bernard, for, you know, I shall be gone to-morrow. We can easily find a heron, or a pheasant, or something he can go after."

"No, no, my boy," said the squire; "this bird is not yet ready to cast off for a free flight. Why, it was only last week that I ceased using the long string with which I brought him back when I wanted him; and, ever since, I have been very careful to have a lure which should be so tempting that he would be certain to come down to it, no matter how high he might soar. See, here is the one I used to-day. He has eaten from it the whole breast of a pigeon."

With this he showed the boys his "lure," which was a rude figure of a bird, the body made of cloth, with the head, talons, and wings of a real bird, and to which had been attached a piece of some kind of meat of which the falcon is fond. By being thus accustomed to find something good to tear and eat when called to his master, the bird gradually learned to obey the call whenever he heard it.



BERNARD, RAYMOND, AND LOUIS MEET THE MONK.

Raymond was quite willing to wait until the hawk was thoroughly trained, before testing him in actual sport; but Louis, very naturally, made great complaint. To-day was his last chance. Bernard, however, was firm, and so they walked towards the chateau, the hooded bird still perched upon the squire's wrist.

Just as the three, now busily talking of Louis' future life at the castle of the Count de Barran, were about entering a little gate in the lower part of the grounds which surround the house, there came out of the gate a monk wearing a long, dark, and rather dirty gown, and walking with his eyes fixed upon the ground, as if deeply engaged in thought. He seemed scarcely to perceive the boys or the squire, as he passed them.

"I shall be glad to be free from those long-gowned folk," said Louis, as they entered the grounds. "No more priests' lessons for me. I shall have knights and soldiers for my teachers."

"All very fine," said Bernard, "but you will have other things to do besides learning how to be a knight and soldier. You will serve your masters and your mistresses at table, clean armor, hold stirrups, and do everything else they ask of you."

"Oh yes," said Louis; "but that will be only while I am a page. In a year and a half all that will be over."

"A year and a half seems to me like a long time," said Raymond; "but time always passes quickly with Louis."

This remark was made to Bernard, but the squire did not appear to hear it. He was looking back through the gate at the departing monk.

"If I only knew that *he* was never coming back," he said to himself, "I would not much care what else happened."

And then he followed the boys up to the chateau.

CHAPTER II.

THE good squire did not make his inhospitable remark in regard to the monk because he had any dislike for monks or priests in general. He had as high an opinion of the members of the clergy as any one, but he had a very strong dislike for this particular prior. To understand his reasons for this feeling, we must know that, not very long before the period at which our story begins, and soon after the Queen Regent had conquered the rebellious provinces, and so consolidated the kingdom, there was established in the city of Toulouse that terrible tribunal of the Romish Church known as the Holy Inquisition. Here persons suspected of holding opinions in opposition to the doctrines taught by the Church were tried, often subjected to tortures in order to induce them to confess the crimes with

which they were charged, and punished with great severity if found guilty. This inquisition was under the charge of the Dominican friars, of which order the man who had just passed out of the little gate was a member.

For several weeks the frequent visits of this prior to the Countess of Viteau had given a great deal of uneasiness to Bernard. The man was not one of the regular religious instructors of the family, nor had he anything to do with the education of the boys. There was some particular reason for his visits to the chateau, and of this the household at large knew nothing; but the fact of his being a Dominican, and therefore connected with the Inquisition, made him an unpleasant visitor to those who saw his comings and goings, but who did not know their object.

Squire Bernard thought that he knew why this Brother Anselmo came so often to the chateau, but he could not be certain that he was right. So he kept his ideas to himself, and did no more than hope that each visit of the friar might be the last.

When the two brothers entered the chateau, they went directly to their mother's apartments. They found her in a large room, the floor of which was covered with soft rushes, for there were no carpets in those days. There was an abundance of furni-

ture, but it was stiff and heavy, and on the walls there hung various pieces of tapestry, of silk or wool, most of which the good lady had embroidered herself.

The Countess of Viteau was a woman of about thirty-five years of age, and of a sweet but dignified appearance and demeanor. She was evidently very fond of her children, and they were equally fond of her. She had a book in her hand when the boys entered (it should be remembered that she was one of the very few ladies of that day who read books), but she laid it down, and drew her sons to her, one on each side.

"Mother," said Louis, as she leaned over to kiss the young fellow who was to leave her the next day for such a long, long time,—“Mother, I wish you would write a letter to the Count de Barran, and ask him to have me taught falconry as soon as possible, and also to get me a hawk of my own, and have him trained.”

“What put that into your head?” asked his mother, who could not help smiling at this absurd idea on the part of a boy who was going to begin life as a page, but who expected to enter at once into the sports and diversions of the grown-up nobility.

“It was Raymond’s falcon that made me think of it,” said Louis. “I suppose I shall not see that bird

fly,—at least, not for ever so long,—and so I want one of my own.”

“I did not intend you should know anything about Raymond’s falcon,” said his mother, “for I knew it would fill your head so full that there would be no room for anything else. But we will not talk of falcons now. I have a great deal to say to my little boy——”

“Not so very little either,” said Louis, drawing himself up to his full height.

“Who is going away,” continued his mother, “to learn to be a page, a squire, and a Christian knight.”

We need not know what she said to him, but the three were together until the room grew dark, and there was no treasure that Louis could take with him which could be so valuable as the motherly advice he received that afternoon.

Louis was to start for Barran’s castle in the forenoon of the next day, and was to be accompanied by Bernard and a small body of archers, for, although there were no wars going on at that time, there was always danger from robbers. All over France, and in many other parts of Europe, there were well-organized bands of men who made a regular business of pillaging travelers on the highways. So it was necessary that Louis should have with him enough men to defend him against an attack by these brigands.

Very early in the morning,—earlier than any one else in the chateau, excepting a few servants,—Louis arose and dressed himself. He did this very quietly, so as not to wake his brother. Then he stole softly down to a room in the lower part of the building, where he knew Bernard kept the falcon he was training. The door of this room was shut, but not locked, and Louis slipped in without waking the squire, who slept soundly in a chamber just across the passage-way.

He closed the door, and looking around the room, into which a little light came from a small, high window, he soon perceived the falcon sitting on a wooden perch, in a corner. The bird was unhooded, but was tied by the leg, with a short cord, to the perch. On a small table near by lay the hood. As Louis approached the falcon, it turned its head quickly towards him and slightly raised its wings. This threatening gesture made the boy hesitate; he did not want to be bitten or scratched. Drawing back, and looking about him, he saw a cloth lying upon a bench. Seizing this, he quickly threw it over the bird, untied the cord, and, muffling with the cloth a little bell which was fastened to one of the falcon's legs, Louis snatched up the hood from the table, and, with the bird under his arm, he hurried out of the room, carefully closing the door behind him.

Out-of-doors, he quickly made his way to the little gate at the bottom of the grounds, and, through this, passed out into the road. When he reached a spot where he could not be seen from the chateau, he sat down, carefully uncovered the head of the falcon, and clapped over it the little hood. Then he threw aside the cloth, and set the bird upon his wrist, where it perched contentedly, although not finding it quite so firm a support as the strong hand of Bernard. While wearing the hood, which completely covered its eyes, it would not attempt to fly.

"Now, then," said he to himself, "I shall try what this fine bird can do; and when I have had an hour's sport, I shall take it back and put it on its perch, and no one will be any the worse for it. If I meet Bernard, as I go back, I shall not care. I shall have had my bit of falconry, and he can have his falcon. There must be herons, or some kind of birds, down in that field by the wood, where we saw Bernard yesterday."

When Louis reached the field, he gazed eagerly into the air and all about him for some flying creature, after which he could send his falcon in chase. But nothing, excepting a few small birds, could he discover, and he was not to be content with such game as they. If he had had dogs with him, or knew how himself to arouse the birds from their covers,

he might have had a chance to send his falcon after a long-legged heron, or a pheasant; but no large bird chose to make its appearance, and poor Louis began to think that he would lose the one chance he had of seeing Raymond's falcon in pursuit of its prey.

Suddenly, from under some bushes near the edge of the wood, a large hare leaped out, and went jumping across an open space towards a little copse a short distance beyond the spot where Louis stood. Our young hunter knew that falcons chased hares, and such small animals, as well as winged game, and he instantly jerked the hood from the head of his bird, and cast it off toward the flying hare.

But, to his amazement, the falcon did not pursue the hare, which, in a few moments, disappeared in the copse. Louis did not know that hawks or falcons were not always trained to chase both hares and birds, and that this one had been accustomed to fly after winged game only.

Instead of swooping upon the hare, which, it is probable, it did not see, the falcon rose into the air, and began to soar around in a great circle.

"Perhaps it will see some game for itself," thought Louis, "and that will do just as well."

But the falcon did not appear to be in pursuit of anything. It only flew around and around, apparently

rising higher and higher each moment. Louis now became anxious for it to come down, so that he could try again in some other place to scare up some game, and he began to whistle and call, as he had heard the falconers do when they wished their birds to descend.

But the falcon paid no attention to his calls, and, after rising to a great height, it flew away to the south, and presently was lost to sight.

Poor Louis was overwhelmed with grief. It seemed to him that he could never hear anything so dismal as the last tinkle of the little bell on the falcon's leg, nor see anything so sad as the dark speck which he watched until it appeared to melt away into the distant sky.

For some minutes Louis stood gazing up into the air, and then he hung his head, while a few tears came into his eyes. But he was a sturdy boy in mind and body, and he did not cry much. He slowly turned, and, with the hood of the falcon in his hand, went back to the house.

"If they ask me about it, I shall tell them," he said to himself, "but I hope they will not find it out just as I am starting away."

It was yet quite early when Louis reached his room, where he found his brother still asleep, and there was soon so much hurry and bustle, in the

preparation for the departure of the little expedition, that the absence of the falcon did not seem to have been discovered.

After a prolonged leave-taking, and a great many tears from his mother and brother, and from many of the retainers and servants of the chateau, Louis set forth for the castle of Barran. He rode his mother's palfrey, a small and gentle horse, and was followed by quite a train of archers and men-at-arms, headed by the trusty Bernard.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN the first pain caused by the separation from his dear mother and brother began to subside in Louis' heart,—and it must be admitted that it began to subside pretty soon, the day being so bright and everybody in such good spirits,—he felt quite proud to see himself at the head of such a goodly company, and greatly wished that they would fall in with some enemy, so that he might have a little conquering to tell about when he should reach his future home. But no enemy was met, and, if a fight had taken place, it is not likely that the boy would have been able to boast of his part in it, for Bernard was very careful of his young charge, and as soon as they had left the neighborhood of the Chateau de Viteau, and had entered the forest through which ran their road for the greater part



LOUIS AND BERNARD ON THEIR WAY TO DE BARDAN'S CASTLE

of the journey, he made Louis ride about the middle of the little procession, while he himself went a short distance in advance, looking carefully about him for the first signs of robbers, or any one else who might be likely to dispute their passage.

But no such persons were met, and towards the end of the afternoon Louis and his train rode into the court-yard of the castle.

The moment that he entered the great gates, the quick eye of the boy perceived that he had come to a place very different from his mother's chateau. He had supposed there would be a difference, but had never imagined it would be so great. There were a good many serving-people, of various ranks and orders, at Viteau. There were ladies in attendance on his mother; and sometimes there were knights and other visitors, whose diversions had made what Raymond and Louis had considered a very gay time; but there never had been anything like the lively scenes which met the eye of our young friend, both in the court-yard and in the halls of the castle itself. Outside there were boy-pages running on various errands, or standing about, watching other people and neglecting their own business; and there were squires, men-at-arms, and archers who were lounging in the shade, or busily at work rubbing up a piece of armor, or putting a point on an

arrow-head or on a blunted lance. Here and there was a knight not clad in armor, but in fine silk and embroidered cloth, looking at horses which were being led about the inclosure by varlets or inferior serving-men, who generally were dressed in clothes of dirty leather. Two barefooted monks, one of them holding the bridle of a donkey, with a bag thrown across his back, were talking together near the gate. Some people were laughing, some were talking, some were calling to others at a distance, and some were hammering; the horses were making a good deal of noise with their feet; a man was blowing a horn, which he had begun to blow as soon as Louis entered the gates, and which was intended, it appeared, as a general announcement that somebody had arrived who was a friend, and had been admitted freely. All together, there was more noise, and moving about, and standing still, and lying down, than Louis had ever seen, at one time, before.

Inside the castle there was not so much bustle; but knights and ladies, the first generally dressed much more finely, and with more show of color and ornament than their female companions, were to be seen here and there. The pages who were not running about or standing still outside, seemed to be doing the same inside; there was a clatter of metal and wooden dishes in the dining-hall, where the ser-

vants were preparing supper ; and, in a room opening into the great hall, a tall knight sat upon a stool, with a little harp on his knee, singing one of the romantic songs which were so much liked in those days, and accompanying his voice with a steady "tum-tum" on the harp-strings. Around him were several knights and ladies, some sitting and some standing, and all listening, with much satisfaction, to his song.

The Count de Barran, a tall, spare man, with an ugly but good-humored face, gave Louis a kindly welcome.

"He is the son of Raymond de Viteau, my old brother-at-arms," he said to a knight with a great brown beard, who stood beside him, "and I shall try to make of him as good a knight as his—as I can."

"You were going to say 'as good a knight as his father,' good sir," said Louis quickly, looking up into Barran's face. "Do you think I cannot be that?"

"That will depend upon yourself," said the master of the castle. "Your father was brave and noble above his fellow-knights. If you become his equal, my little fellow, I shall be very proud. And now I shall send you to my sister, the Lady Clemence, who will see that you are taken care of."

"The boy's quickness of wit comes out well, even now," said the brown-bearded knight; "but you may have to wait for the bravery and the honor to show themselves."

"Not long, I hope," replied Barran. "Good blood must soon make some sign, if he has it in him."

The next day Bernard and his train returned to Viteau, with many messages from Louis, and the life of the boy, as the youngest page in the castle, fairly commenced. In a few days he began to understand his duties, and to make friends among the other pages, all of whom were sons of well-born people. These boys had come to the castle to receive the only education they would ever have. Louis did not at first very much like to wait upon the knights and ladies at table, and to find himself expected to serve so many people in so many ways; but he soon became used to these things, especially when he saw other boys, whom he knew to be just as good as he was, doing what he was expected to do.

He had a bright, interesting face, and he soon became a favorite, especially among the ladies, for they liked to be waited upon by a page who was so good-humored and quick. The Count de Barran was not married, and his sister, the Lady Clemence, was at the head of domestic affairs in his castle.

The only very young person among the visitors at

the castle was a little girl named Agnes, the motherless daughter of Count Hugo de Lanne, the brown-bearded man who had talked with De Barran about his new page. Between this girl and Louis a friendship soon sprang up. Agnes was a year older than he, and she knew so much of castle-life, and of the duties of a page, that she became one of his best instructors. She was a lively, impulsive girl; and this was the reason, no doubt, why she and Louis got on so well together.

One morning, as Agnes was passing through an upper hall, she saw, standing at a window which overlooked the court-yard, our young friend Louis, with an enormous battle-ax over his shoulder. As she approached, he turned from the window, out of which he had been looking.

"What in the world," she cried, "are you doing with that great ax, and what makes you look so doleful?"

"I am taking the ax down to the armorer's shop, to be sharpened and polished," he said.

"It is too big a thing for you to be carrying about," said Agnes, "and it seems sharp enough now. And as to you, you look as if you were going somewhere to cut your head off with it. What is the matter with you?"

"That is the matter," said Louis, turning again

to the window, and pointing to a body of horsemen who were just riding out of the gate. They had dogs with them, and several of them carried each a hooded falcon perched upon his wrist.

"Did you want to go hunting herons? Is that what troubles you?" asked Agnes.

"No, indeed; I don't want to go," said Louis. "I hate to see falcons."

"What did you look at them for, then?" asked Agnes. "But I don't see how you can hate them. I love to see them swooping about, so lordly, in the air. Why do not you like them as well as I do?"

Moved by a strong desire to share his secret with some one, Louis, after a little hesitation, finally put the battle-ax on the floor, and told Agnes the whole story of the loss of his brother's falcon, first making her promise that she would never repeat it to any one. He told it all in a straightforward way, and finished by explaining how the sight of the hunters made him think of his poor brother, who could not go hawking for ever so long. Indeed, he did not know that Bernard would be willing to get another hawk and take all the trouble of training it. He might be very angry.

"I think it's easy enough to make that right," said Agnes. "You ought to give your brother another hawk, already trained."

"I would like much to know where I am to get it," said Louis.

Agnes thought for a moment.

"My father will give you one," she said, "if I ask him. If he questions me as to what you want with it, I can tell him, with truth, that you want to give it to your brother, who has no falcon, and who needs one very much."

"Do you really think he would give me one?" asked Louis, with brightening face.

"I am sure of it," said Agnes. "He has plenty of trained falcons, and he could spare one easily enough. I will ask him, as soon as he comes back to-day."

Accordingly, when Count Hugo returned from his hawking expedition that afternoon, he was met by his little daughter, who asked him for a falcon, a well-trained and good one, which could hunt hares as well as birds, and which would be sure to come back to its master whenever it was called.

Of course such a request as this excited some surprise, and required a good deal of explanation. But when Count Hugo, who was a very indulgent father, and who had also quite a liking for Louis, heard what was to be done with the bird, he consented to give it.

"If he wanted it for himself," he said, "I should

not let him have it, for a page has no need of falcons, and a boy of the right spirit ought not to desire gifts; but, as he wants it for his brother, who is in a station to use it, it shows a generous disposition, and he shall have it." And calling to one of his falconers to bring him a hawk, he handed it to Agnes, and told her that she should herself give it to her young friend.

"He and you can look at it for a quarter of an hour," said the Count, "and then he must bring it back to Orlon, here, who will feed and take care of it until the boy has an opportunity of sending it to his brother. Don't take its hood off, and keep your fingers well clear of its beak."

When Agnes appeared with the falcon unsteadily perched on her two small fists, which she had covered with a scarf, to keep its talons from hurting her, Louis was overwhelmed with delight. He was sure that this was a much finer bird than the one he had lost.

When the falcon had been sufficiently admired, and had been returned to its keeper, and when Louis had run to find Count Hugo, and had thanked him for his kindness, the question arose between the two young friends: How was he to be carried to Raymond?

"If I had any way of riding there, I'd take it to



LOUIS, AGNES, AND THE FALCON.

him myself. I want him to have it just as soon as he can get it," said Louis.

"I can lend you my jennet, said Agnes. "He is small, but can travel far."

"You will lend him!" cried Louis. "And are you not going to use him for two days? It will take at the very least two days to go to Viteau and come back."

"I may not ride him for a week," said Agnes. "But you must not travel to your mother's house alone. You must wait until some company is going that way."

Louis would have been willing to start off by himself, but he knew he would not be allowed to do so; and he had to curb his impatience for three whole days before an opportunity of making his journey offered itself. Then a knight from the south was leaving the castle, with a small train, and as they would pass near Viteau, Louis was allowed to accompany them.

The Count de Barran was not pleased that his new page should ask for leave of absence so soon; but, as it was represented that there was good reason for the journey, and as the Lady Clemence urged the boy's request, he was allowed to go.

So, early one morning Louis started away, the gayest of his company, his little Spanish steed

frisking beneath him, the falcon perched bravely on his arm, and Agnes waving her scarf to him from a window of the castle.

All went well during the forenoon, excepting that the falcon became very heavy, and had to be perched on the saddle-bow ; but, during a short halt which the party made about noon, Louis discovered that it was not the intention of the knight from the south to take the most direct road to Viteau. He meant, a mile or two farther on, to turn to the east, and to spend the night at a chateau belonging to a friend. Then, the next day, he would pursue his journey and would pass, by a rather circuitous road, near to Viteau.

Louis did not want to stop all night anywhere excepting in his mother's house, and he made up his mind that, when he reached the forking of the road, he would leave the party and gallop on to Viteau. It could not be far, and his spirited little horse would soon take him there.

Consequently, when he came to the place where his companions took their way eastward, Louis fell behind and, instead of following them, he kept on the road to Viteau, urging his horse forward at the top of its speed. He hoped that his departure had not been noticed, and that he would not be missed until he had gone so far that he could not be

overtaken. He expected to be pursued, for he knew the knight and his men would not allow him to go off by himself if it could be prevented.

So he galloped on, his falcon tightly grasping the saddle-bow, and he himself turning around every few minutes, to see if he were followed. But he saw no horsemen riding after him. The knight's men had straggled a good deal after they had turned into the new road, and Louis was not missed for an hour or two. Then, when his absence was discovered, the knight sent three men after him, with instructions to bring him back, or to escort him to Viteau, in case they found him near that place. It was supposed, of course, that he had slipped away, so as to get home as soon as possible.

The men did not like the job at all, for they feared they would not be able to return until after dark to the chateau where their party was to spend the night, and they did not fancy traveling at night for the sake of a boy they knew very slightly, and cared very little about. So, after riding five or six miles, they agreed to halt until nearly night, and ride back to their party at the top of their speed, and report that they had overtaken Louis, and had accompanied him to a spot within sight of his mother's chateau. This story was believed by the knight from the south, who had no very clear idea

as to the distance of Viteau from the forks of the road; and no further thought was given to the young page.

As for Louis, he kept madly on his way. His horse was strong and fleet, but it was beginning to flag a little in its pace, when, suddenly, it stopped short. A tall man stood in front of it, and in a moment had seized the panting animal by the bridle. Another man, with a pike in his hand, appeared on the right, while several others came out from behind some bushes on the left. The tall man wore a cuirass, or body-armor, of steel rings linked closely together, which had probably once been bright and shining, but which was now very rusty and old. He wore no other armor, and his clothes seemed torn and soiled. The whole party, indeed, as Louis, with open mouth and eyes, glanced quickly around him,—too much startled to speak,—seemed to be a very rusty set of fellows.

Louis did not long remain silent. Indeed, he was the first one to speak. He had often seen such persons as these among the serfs and varlets at the castle, and he had been accustomed to respect from them.

“Ho there!” he cried, “move out of my way. Step from the road, do you hear? I am going home to my mother’s chateau, and I am in a hurry.”

"Your mother can wait," said the tall man. "We should be pleased to have your company ourselves to-night. So do not be angry. You can not go on."

"I believe," cried Louis, his eyes flashing, although they were full of tears, "that you are a set of robbers."

"That is true," said the other, "and this little man, and this little horse, and this very fine falcon, are our booty."

CHAPTER IV.

LOUIS did not submit readily to his captors. At first he was angry ; then he cried, and when some of the men laughed at him for being a baby he got angry again, and told them they were a band of cowards to set upon him in this way,—a dozen men on one boy,—and that if they wanted to rob him they might do it and go about their business. He did not care ; he could walk home.

“ No, no, my valiant page,” said the leader of the robbers ; “ we don’t want you to walk and we don’t want you to go home. We shall take you with us now, and we will see about the robbing afterward.”

And with this he turned the little horse around, and led him, by a path which Louis had passed without noticing it, into the depths of the forest. On the way, the robber asked his young prisoner a

great many questions regarding his family, his connections, and his present business in riding thus alone through the forest roads. To these questions Louis was ready enough to give answer, for it was not his nature to conceal anything, unless he thought it absolutely necessary. Indeed, he was quite proud of the opportunity thus afforded him of talking about the rank and importance of his mother, and of dwelling upon the great power and warlike renown of the nobleman under whom he served.

"They will not let me stay here long, you may be sure of that," said Louis. "As soon as they hear that you have carried me off, they will take me away from you."

"I hope so, indeed," said the robber, laughing; "and if I had not thought that they would take you from me, I should not have taken the trouble to capture you."

"Oh, I know what you mean," said the boy. "You expect them to ransom me."

"I most certainly do," replied the other.

"But they will not do it," cried Louis. "They will come with soldiers and take me from you!"

"We shall see," returned the robber.

It was almost dark when, by many winding and sometimes almost invisible paths through the forest, the party reached a collection of rude huts, which

were evidently the present dwelling-places of these robbers, or *cotereaux*, as they were called. There were several classes of highwaymen, or brigands, in France at this time, and of these the *cotereaux* were, probably, the most numerous.

There were fires built in various places about the open space in which the huts had been erected, and there were a good many men around the fires. A smell of cooking meat made Louis feel sure that supper would soon be ready, and this was a comforting thing to him, for he was very hungry. The supper which was served to him was of plain food, but he had enough, and the bed he slept on, at the back part of the Captain's hut, was nothing but a lot of dry leaves and twigs, with a coarse cloth thrown over it; but Louis was very tired, and it was not long before he was sound asleep.

He was much troubled, of course, at the thought of going to bed in this way, in the midst of a band of robbers, but he was not afraid that they would do him any injury, for he had heard enough about these *cotereaux* to know that they took prisoners almost always for the purpose of making money out of them, and not to do them useless harm. If he had been an older and a deeper thinker, he would, probably, have thought of the harm which might be done to him in case no money could be made by

his capture ; but this matter did not enter his mind. He went to sleep with the feeling that what he wanted now was a good night's rest, and that, in some way or other, all would be right on the morrow.

Michol, the captain of the band, was very plain-spoken, the next morning, in telling Louis his plans in regard to him. "I know well," he said, "that your mother is able to pay a handsome ransom for you, and, if she is so hard-hearted that she will not do it, I can depend on Barran. He will not let a page from his castle pine away in these woods, for the sake of a handful of gold."

"My mother is not hard-hearted," said Louis, "and I am not going to pine away, no matter how long you keep me. Do you intend to send to my mother to-day?"

"Not so soon as that," replied Michol. "I shall let her have time to feel what a grievous thing it is to have a son carried away to the heart of the forest, where she can never find him, and where he must stay, month after month and year after year, until she pays his worthy captors what she thinks the boy is worth."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Louis. "If you will give me my horse and my falcon, which your men have taken from me, and will let me have again my dagger, I will go to Viteau, myself, and

tell my mother about the ransom; and I promise you that she will send you all the money she can afford to spend for me in that way. And, if there is no one else to bring it,—for our men might be afraid to venture among so many robbers,—I shall bring it myself, on my way back to Barran's castle. I am not afraid to come."

"I am much pleased to hear that, my boy," said Michol, "but I do not like your plan. When I am ready, I shall send a messenger, and no one will be afraid to bring me the money, when everything is settled. But one thing you can do. If you have ever learned to write,—and I have heard that the Countess of Viteau has taught her sons to be scholars,—you may write a letter to your mother, and tell her in what a doleful plight you find yourself, and how necessary it is that she should send all the money that I ask for. Thus she will see that you are really my prisoner, and will not delay to come to your assistance. One of my men, Jasto, will give you a pen and ink, and something to write your letter on. You may go, now, and look for Jasto. You will know him by his torn clothes and his thirst for knowledge."

"Torn clothes!" said Louis, as he walked away. "They all have clothes of that kind. And, as for his thirst for knowledge, I can not see how I am to

find out that. I suppose the Captain wanted to give me something to do, so as to keep me from troubling him. I am not going to look for any Jasto. If I could find my horse, and could get a chance, I should jump on him and gallop away from these fellows."

Louis wandered about among the huts, peering here and there for a sight of Agnes's little jennet. But he saw nothing of him, for the animal had been taken away to another part of the forest, to keep company with other stolen horses. And even if he had been able to mount and ride away unobserved, it would have been impossible for Louis to find his way along the devious paths of the forest to the highway. More than this, although he seemed to be wandering about in perfect liberty, some of the men had orders to keep their eyes upon the boy, and to stop him if he endeavored to penetrate into the forest.

"Ho, there!" said a man, whom Louis suddenly met, as he was walking between two of the huts, "are you looking for anything? What have you lost?"

"I have lost nothing," said Louis, deeming it necessary to reply only to the last question.

"I thought you lost your liberty yesterday," said the other, "and, before that, you must have lost your

senses, to be riding alone on a road, walled in for miles and miles by trees, bushes, and brave *cotercaux*. But, of course, I did not suppose that you came here to look for either your liberty or your senses. What is it you want?"

Louis had no intention of telling the man that he was looking for his horse, and so, as he felt obliged to give some answer, he said:

"I was sent to look for Jasto, so that I could write a letter to my mother."

"Jasto!" exclaimed the man. "Well, my young page, if you find everything in the world as easily as you found Jasto, you will do well. I am Jasto. And do you know how you came to find me?"

"I chanced to meet you," said Louis.

"Not so," said the other. "If I had not been looking for you, you never would have found me. Things often happen in that manner. If what we are looking for does not look for us, we never find it. But what is this about your mother and a letter? Sit down here, in this bit of shade, and make these things plain to me."

Louis accepted this invitation, for the sun was beginning to be warm, and he sat down by the man, at the foot of a tree.

"I do not believe you are Jasto," he said, looking at his companion. "Your clothes are not



torn. I was told to look for a man with torn clothes."

"Torn clothes!" exclaimed the other. "What are you talking of? Not torn? Why, boy, my clothes are more torn and are worse torn and have staid torn longer than the clothes of any man in all our goodly company. But they have been mended, you see, and that is what makes them observable among so many sadly tattered garments."

Louis looked at the coarse jerkin, breeches, and stockings of the man beside him. They were, certainly, torn and ripped in many places, and the torn places were of many curious shapes, as if the wearer had been making a hurried journey through miles of bramble bushes; but all the torn places were carefully mended with bright-red silk thread, which made them more conspicuous than if they had not been mended at all.

"I see that they have been torn," said Louis, "but they are not torn now."

"A great mistake, my good sir page—a great mistake," said the other; "once torn, always torn. If my clothes are mended, that but gives them another quality. Then they have two qualities. They are torn and they are mended. If one's clothes are torn, the only way to have clothes that are not torn is to have new ones. Think of that, boy, and

make no rents in yourself nor in your clothes. Although mending can be done very well," he added, looking complacently at his breeches, "the evil of it is, though, that it always shows,"

"I could mend better than that," said Louis.

"That is to be hoped; it is truly to be hoped," said the other, "for you have had better chances than I. This red silk, left in our hands by a fair lady, who was taking it to waste it in embroidery in some friend's castle, was all the thread I had for my mending. Now, you could have all things suitable for your mending, whether of clothes or of mind or of body, if it should so happen that you should have rents in any of these. But tell me, now, about your letter."

"There is nothing to tell," said Louis, "excepting that your Captain wishes me to write a letter to my mother, urging her to send good ransom for me, and that he said you could give me pen and ink and something to write upon."

"Pen and ink are well enough," said the man, who, as Louis now believed, was really Jasto, "for I can make them. But something to write on is a more difficult matter to find. Paper is too scarce, and parchment costs too much; and so there is none of either in this company. But I shall see to it that you have something to write on when you are

ready to write. It strikes me that the chief trouble will be to put together the three things—the pen and the ink and the something to write on—in such a manner as to make a letter of them. Did you ever write a letter?”

“Not yet. But I know how to do it,” said Louis; and, as he spoke, he remembered how he had promised his brother to write a letter to him. He was now going to send a letter to Viteau, but under what strange circumstances it would be written! If he were at the castle, Agnes would help him. He wished he had thought of asking her, weeks ago, to help him.

“I have written a letter myself,” said Jasto, “but before I had written it I trembled to say I could do it. And I was a grown man, and had fought in three battles. But pages are bolder than soldiers. Would you like to hear about my letter?”

“Indeed I should,” said Louis, anxious to listen to anything which might give him a helping hint regarding the duty he had taken upon himself.

“Well, then,” said Jasto, stretching out his legs, “I shall tell you about my letter. It was just before —”

“Jasto!” rang out a voice from the opposite side of the inclosure formed by the huts.

“There!” cried Jasto, jumping to his feet, “that

is the Captain. I must go. But you sit still, just where you are, and when I come back, which will be shortly, I shall tell you about my letter."

CHAPTER V.

WE must now go back to the Chateau de Viteau, and see what has happened there since the departure of Louis for his new home. Of course, the boy was greatly missed by his mother and brother, but Raymond soon found himself so busy that he had not time enough to grieve very much over the absence of his old playmate. In order to prepare himself for the school at Paris he was obliged to study diligently, and in order that he might make a good appearance at the house of his cousin, with whom he was to live, Bernard insisted on his employing nearly all his leisure time in out-door exercises and knightly accomplishments. Hawking was postponed for the present, for, after the loss of Raymond's falcon was discovered, Bernard declared that he had not the heart to train another one immedi-

ately, even if a good bird could be easily obtained, which was not the case.

Very little was said about the disappearance of the falcon. Raymond, his mother, and the squire each had a suspicion that Louis had had something to do with it; but no one of them mentioned it to either of the others. Each hoped the suspicion was unfounded, and therefore said nothing about it.

While Raymond was busy with his studies and his manly exercises, the mind of Bernard, even while giving the boy the benefit of his knowledge of the management of horses and the use of arms, was occupied with a very serious matter.

As has been said before, the Countess of Viteau was one of the very few ladies in France who was fairly educated, and who took an interest in acquiring knowledge from books. This disposition, so unusual at that time, together with her well-known efforts to have her sons educated, even giving a helping hand herself whenever she found that she was qualified to do so, had attracted attention to her, and many people began to talk about her, as a woman who gave a great deal of time to useless pursuits. Why should a lady of her rank—these people said—wish to read books and study out the meaning of old manuscripts, as if she were of no higher station than a poor monk? If there were anything in the

books and parchments which she ought to know, the priests would tell her all about it.

But the Countess thought differently, and she kept on with her reading, which was almost entirely confined to religious works, and in this way she gradually formed some ideas about religious matters which were somewhat different from those taught at that time by the Church of Rome, or, at least, from those taught by the priests about her. She saw no harm in her opinions, and did not hesitate to speak of them to the priests who came to the chateau from a neighboring monastery, and even to argue in favor of them.

The priests, however, did see harm in the ideas of the Countess, simply because, in those days, people had very narrow and bigoted ways of thinking in regard to religious affairs, and it was generally thought that any person having an opinion differing, even very little, from what was taught by the monks and priests, was doing a wicked thing to persist in such an opinion after he had been told it was wrong.

For this reason, when the priests who had charge of the religious services at Viteau found that their arguments made no impression on the Countess, who was able to answer them back in such a way that they could find nothing more to say on their side of the question, they reported the state of affairs

to some of the higher officers of the Church, and, in due time, a man was sent to Viteau to find out exactly what its mistress did think, and why she was so wicked as to think it.

The person who was sent was the Dominican monk, Brother Anselmo, who was met by the two boys and Bernard, on the occasion when we first made their acquaintance. Brother Anselmo was a quiet-spoken man, making no pretensions to authority or to superior knowledge; and the Countess talked with him and answered his questions freely and unsuspectingly. She knew he was a Dominican, and she knew he had come to the neighborhood of Viteau on purpose to talk with her on certain religious subjects; but this did not surprise her, as she supposed all good people were just as much interested in these subjects as she was; but she had no idea that he was connected with the Inquisition at Toulouse.

Bernard, the squire, however, knew well who he was, and it troubled him greatly to know it.

Some weeks after the Dominican had begun to make his almost daily visits to Viteau, he came, one day, accompanied by another monk, who did not enter the grounds, but who remained outside the little gate, waiting for his companion to return.

Bernard noticed the monk waiting outside, and

thinking that this unusual occurrence had something suspicious about it, he followed Brother Anselmo when he left the chateau, and, as he rejoined his fellow monk, the squire slipped quietly up to the wall and listened to what they said to each other. In this case, Bernard did not consider that he was doing a very improper thing. He feared that danger threatened the household of Viteau, and that these two monks were the persons through whom the evil would come. Therefore, he believed that it was his duty to employ every possible means of averting this danger; and he listened with all his ears.

What he heard was very little. The two monks stood silent a few moments, and then the one who had been waiting said something in a low voice, which Bernard could not hear. To this Brother Anselmo answered: "We have done all we can. I think it is a case for the Holy Inquisition."

And then the two walked off together.

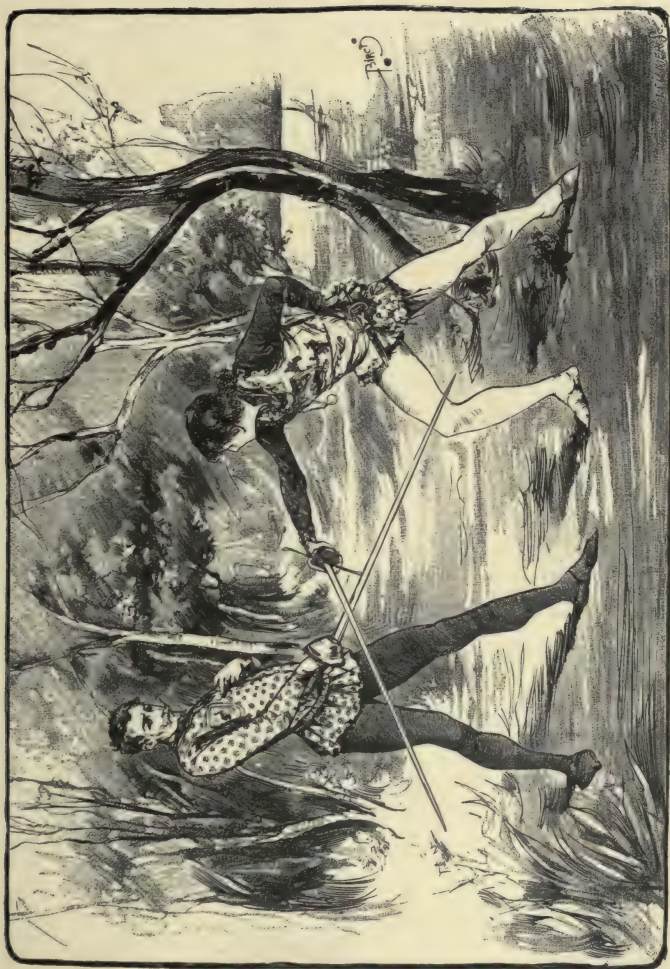
Bernard now knew that his fears were correct. His beloved mistress, on account of some of her religious opinions, was in danger of being carried a prisoner to Toulouse, there to be tried before the officers of the Inquisition. He had no doubt that her opinions, whatever they were, were entirely correct, for he had a great respect for her religious knowledge, and he felt sure she knew more than

the monks who came to the chateau, but he well understood that, if she should be put on trial, and if the doctrines she believed to be true were found to differ, in the least point, from those taught by the priests, she would be considered guilty of heresy, and perhaps be put to death.

The squire went away from the wall a very sad man. He was certain that no one at the chateau but himself knew of the danger of its mistress, and he felt that it rested on him to take some immediate steps to save her, if that were possible.

As he approached the house, Bernard met Raymond, who was coming to take some lessons from him in the use of the long sword. The good squire never threw so much energy and good-will into his lessons as he did that day.

"If he has to fight for his mother," he said to himself, "I want him to fight well."



BERNARD TEACHING RAYMOND THE USE OF THE LONG SWORD.

CHAPTER VI.

FOR some days after the departure of Louis for his mother's chateau, none of his friends had the least idea of his unfortunate situation. At the castle it was supposed that he was overstaying his time with his family, and at Viteau no one knew that he had left the castle. At last, Barran, somewhat provoked that the boy should so deliberately disobey his orders,—for he had told him to return promptly,—and knowing that his mother could always furnish him an escort, sent messengers to Viteau, demanding that Louis should immediately come back with them.

This, of course, caused great consternation at the chateau, and the messengers went hurriedly home, accompanied by Raymond, to tell the news that Louis had not yet been seen at his mother's house.

The Countess wished Bernard to go with the

messengers, but this he refused to do, urging that his place could be nowhere else than at Viteau, and that Raymond could confer as well as any one else with Barran, regarding the immediate steps which should be taken to find out what had become of Louis, and to rescue him from any danger he might have fallen into.

The Countess spent the time, during Raymond's absence, in tears and prayers. When he returned, there came with him a small troop of well-armed men, which Barran had sent to press on, as rapidly as possible, to the estates of the knight from the South, for it had been thought very likely that this knight had been prevented in some way from stopping at Viteau, and that he had taken Louis on with him, intending to send him back at some convenient opportunity. That the boy should have been lost, in any way, from the company of the southern knight, Barran did not consider possible.

This belief of a man so sensible as Barran partially comforted the Countess; but when the troop returned, and told how Louis had left the knight's company to ride on by himself, as none could doubt, to his mother's house, the poor lady was completely overwhelmed with grief, and thus she remained until Barran arrived at Viteau, for which place he started as soon as he heard the news.

Vigorous measures were now taken for a search after Louis. It was generally agreed that he must have been captured by robbers, for there was no other danger which was likely to befall him on the road; but what robbers had taken him, and to what place they had conveyed him, were questions not easy to answer. That a band of *cotereaux* might then be in the forest, within ten or fifteen miles of Viteau, was not at all improbable; but to find out their hiding-place, and, also, to find them in it, would certainly be difficult tasks. The forests of that time spread over such a vast extent of country, and were so dense, and in many places so apparently pathless, that to find anything so carefully hidden as a robber's camp would be a matter almost as much of chance as of skill and design.

Barran privately declared that, if it were not for the Countess, who seemed almost overcome with grief, he would quietly wait a few days before attempting to penetrate the forest with any force; for he was sure that, if the boy had been captured by *cotereaux*, their only object was to get a ransom for him, and that they would soon be heard from. Under the circumstances, however, Count de Barran saw that it would be necessary to take immediate action, and Bernard was very active in pushing forward the most warlike preparations.

Some of these appeared almost ridiculous to the Count.

"How now, Squire?" he said. "One might think that we expected the rascals to attack this chateau, and carry off the other boy. By the plans you lay, there will be more cross-bows and lances left at Viteau than we shall carry with us into the forest."

"I should not leave the Countess defenseless, good Sir Count," replied the squire.

"I know you are a good man and a brave soldier, Bernard," said Barran, "and as much to be trusted, in peace or war, as many a knight of good renown; but this is something too prudent. In these times the *cotereaux* do not come out of their holes to our chateaux and castles to carry us away.

Bernard hesitated before making answer to this speech. He had intended informing Barran of his recent discoveries in regard to the visits of the Dominican monk, but he had not thought it well to speak of the matter now, when the minds of every one were so occupied with the present great trouble. However, he knew that it would be necessary to give the reasons for the peculiar measures he advocated, and so he said, in a low but impressive tone:

"No, good Sir Count, the *cotereaux* do not come to our houses to carry us away, but the officers of the Holy Inquisition do,"

"What means that?" cried Barran, turning pale; and then, on a warning signal from the squire, he lowered his voice and continued: "Has the Countess brought upon herself the censure of the priests, by her strange ideas about the saints? I have heard of them. Tell me quickly, is that what you mean?"

The squire bowed his head.

"This is, indeed, grievous," said Barran; but, surely, we need have no great fears. Tell me, quickly, what has happened?"

Then Bernard told all that he feared and all that he had heard.

Barran was not easily frightened. Indeed, he was too apt to sneer at things which other people considered dangerous; but this was such a very serious matter that it caused him great anxiety and even fear, when he heard of the peril to which the wife of his dear old friend was likely to be exposed.

"This must not be allowed," he said. "We can not suffer that gentle lady to be taken from us by the Inquisition. Even if she should be found entirely innocent, which is not likely, the trial itself is something I cannot think of for a moment. And yet what is to be done? We can not fight the Church."

"No, Sir Count," said Bernard, "but I shall be here, with all the force of men and arms that I can

bring together, to defend my lady, and if the Church fights me, I shall do my best battle."

"And you shall not do battle alone, my good Bernard," said Barran; "but it may be that we shall find some better way to avert the evil than by force of arms, which, indeed, would amount to very little, I fear me, in the end. But now we must give our hearts and hands to the finding of this poor, foolish boy."

Bernard was perfectly willing to give his heart to the finding of Louis, but he would not give his hand. Nothing could induce him to leave the chateau, where he insisted upon being left with a moderate force of well-armed men.

Barran, with several knights from his castle, for whom he had sent when he found that there would, probably, be more work to be done than he had at first anticipated, set out as soon as possible, at the head of a large body of followers, some of whom were expert in all kinds of wood-craft, and as capable as any men could be of finding out the paths of beasts or human beings in the depths of the woods.

The party quickly made its way along the road down which Louis must have ridden; and, a few miles below the place where the road forked, turned into the woods, to the west, and made careful search

for paths, or any traces of the passage of men through the undergrowth. Several well-marked paths were soon discovered, and along the most promising of these Barran and his men pushed their way, sometimes separating, in various directions, and then coming together again, until they had penetrated far into the forest.

Unfortunately for the success of their search, the camp of the *cotereaux* was in the woods to the east of the road. To be sure, the forest, in every direction, would be searched in time, but if the Count's party should keep on in the way it was going, it would be long before it could find the huts of Captain Michol.

Raymond stayed at the chateau with his mother. He much wished to join the Count's party in the search for his brother, but Barran told him that it was his duty to try to comfort and console the Countess until Louis should be brought back, and, therefore, Raymond reluctantly remained at Viteau. He loved his mother, and was always willing to do anything that would please or benefit her, but, in this case, he thought that she, being safe at home, did not need him nearly so much as his poor brother, who probably was suffering in captivity, no one knew where.

On the evening of the second day after the

departure of the searching party, Raymond came down into the grounds of the chateau. His mother was asleep, and he came out for a little exercise.

Not far from the house he met the squire.

"Bernard," said Raymond, "I think it is a foolish thing for you and me and all these men to be idling here. We might leave my mother with her ladies, and a man or two, and go, the rest of us, to help scour the woods to find dear Louis."

Just at this moment, and before Bernard could answer him, Raymond saw, coming up from the lower part of the grounds, the Dominican monk, Brother Anselmo.

"What does that man want, Bernard?" he exclaimed. "There have been two priests here to-day, to console my mother in her affliction, and I do not think another one is needed now, especially not this man, who does not belong to our monastery and who keeps himself a stranger to me. My mother is asleep, and should not be disturbed."

"If she is asleep," said the squire, "she shall not be disturbed."

He then walked back to the house, closely followed by Raymond, and stood in the entrance door. In a few moments the monk appeared, and with a slight motion of the head, but not a word, stepped

forward to pass in. But the squire stood stoutly before him, and stopped him.

"My lady, the Countess," he said, "is weary and sick at heart on account of the loss of her young son. She is sleeping now and can not be disturbed."

"If she is sick at heart," said Brother Anselmo, "that is the greater reason why I should see her."

"It can not be," said Bernard. "She needs rest, and no one must disquiet her."

"What right have you, Squire Bernard," said the monk, "to forbid my entrance? Are you the master of this house?"

"No," said Raymond, stepping forward, "but I am, when my mother can not act as its mistress, and I say that no one shall disturb her this night. Two priests have been here to-day, and I know she expects no others."

"Boy," said Brother Anselmo, "stand aside! You should be chastised for such presumptuous words; and as for you, Squire, I command you, in the name of the Church, to let me pass."

"I honor the Church as much as any man," said Bernard, "but I do not believe that she grants to her priests the right to ask what they please, in her name. I might come to be asked for my purse, in the name of the Church; and that I would not give up, any more than I shall give up my right

to protect my mistress, the Countess, in this, her first hour of sleep and rest for many days."

Brother Anselmo was very angry. Shaking his fist at the sturdy squire, he cried:

"Stupid blunderer! You shall see, and that right soon, what power the Church gives me." And then, without another word, he turned and walked rapidly away.

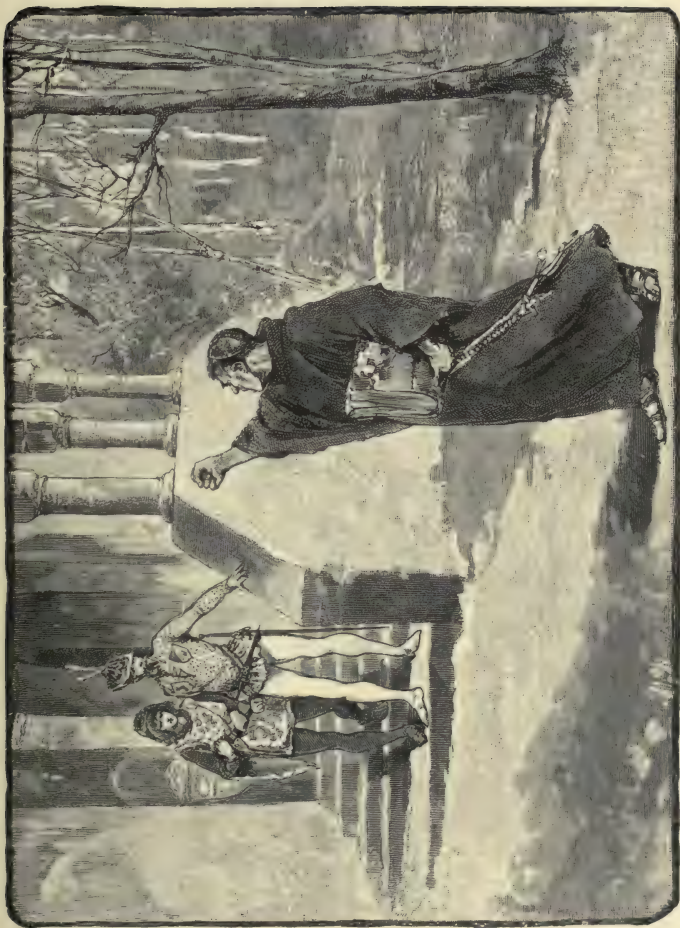
"What does he mean?" asked Raymond. I greatly dislike that monk. He is always asking my mother questions which trouble her much to answer."

Bernard made no reply, but stood for a moment in deep thought. Then he said to himself: "An hour to the monastery, and an hour back. There is yet time, and the plan I think of will be the better one. I can not trust the men to stand against the priests. Raymond! Run now, and have your horse saddled and bridled, and ride out of the upper gate, and wait for me in the road."

"Why so?" cried Raymond, in surprise. It is too late for exercises."

"I can not answer now," said Bernard, hurrying away. "Be speedy and I will tell you on the road."

Raymond, much amazed, but feeling quite sure that the squire had some good reason for this strange proceeding, ran to get his horse, while Bernard ordered the men-at-arms to hastily equip



BROTHER ANSELMO THREATENS BERNARD AND RAYMOND.

themselves for an expedition, and to gather together, mounted, inside the north gate. Then he went upstairs to the apartments of the Countess, and asked to speak with one of her ladies. The Countess, who was only lightly dozing on a couch, heard the squire's voice, and, instantly rising, called to him to know what news he brought.

Bernard advanced within the door-way, and in a hurried voice told his lady that the news he brought was of great import, but that he must tell it to her alone. The Countess then desired the ladies who were with her to retire to another room, and the squire, in as few words as possible, but very earnestly and forcibly, told her of her great danger, of the threats of the Dominican monk, and of the fact that he had heard, that day, of the arrival of a body of men, well-armed, at the neighboring monastery.

"In an hour or so," he said, "these men will be here, I greatly fear me. Raymond is already on the road, for I wished to spare him this wretched story, and, if we do not start quickly for Barran's castle, where you will find present safety, it may happen that weeks and months may pass before you will have news of Louis, even if he should be found to-morrow."

"You mean that I may not be here to meet the news?" the lady said.

Bernard bowed his head. The Countess did not hesitate, but came to a decision at once.

"I shall be ready," she said, "in a very short time. Have horses prepared for myself and my three ladies. We must hasten to Raymond, if he be alone on the road."

She then called her ladies, and began to make rapid preparations for the journey.

The horses were scarcely ready when the ladies made their appearance in the court, and, in a few minutes, accompanied by Bernard and the men-at-arms, they rode out of the north gate. An elderly man, who acted as seneschal, or keeper of the establishment, was left, with the ordinary servants and vassals, in charge of the chateau.

Raymond, riding slowly up and down the road, was soon overtaken, and then the squire, without entering into explanations, urged his party onward as swiftly as possible.

"What is the meaning of all this?" cried Raymond, in great perplexity, riding up to his mother. "It is stranger than any of the old tales the women used to tell me."

The Countess was a lady of strong mind and body, and although the unknown fate of her younger son had overwhelmed her with grief, this new peril to her whole family had thoroughly

aroused her, and she was riding steadily and swiftly onward.

“It is a strange tale,” she said—“stranger far than any I thought would ever be told in this fair land; but I can not tell it to you, my boy, until our journey’s end. Then you shall hear it all.”

So Raymond, with the rest, rode on, and he, with all the others, excepting the squire and his mother, supposed that this long night-ride had something to do with the rescue of Louis.

CHAPTER VII.

LOUIS sat for a long time, in the bit of shade by the tree, before Jasto returned; but, when that learned man at last made his appearance, he merely remarked that the Captain had kept him longer than he had supposed he would, and, after that, he had to look for a quill, of which to make a pen.

“It is not an easy thing to get the right kind of quill for a pen, you must know,” he said, as he took his seat by Louis, and began to scrape the lower end of a long quill with a broad, sharp knife which he took from his belt. “A crow-quill will do very well, or even a quill from a hawk; but I like a long one, like this, which came from a heron’s wing, nailed up in one of our houses. And he who nailed it up never dreamed of the benefit that a

quill from that wing would bring to our good company."

"What benefit?" asked Louis.

"The benefit that comes from the money your mother will send us when she reads your letter."

"Oh!" said Louis.

"And while I make this pen," continued his companion, "I shall tell you the story of my letter."

"Yes, indeed," cried Louis; "I should rather have that than the pen—at least, just now."

"That is a bad choice, for the pen is to give you liberty, and the story will not do that. However, there is a lesson in the story, and you shall have it. It was just before one of the battles between Queen Blanche and the Duke of Burgundy. I was a soldier then, in the service of a good knight; and although I was not his squire, but a simple man-at-arms, ready to fight on horse or on foot, or not to fight at all, just as the case might be, still I was a better man than the squire—for he could not write, any more than his master could. So, just before the battle, the knight sent for me, and, said he, 'Jasto, I have heard that you are a wise fellow and can write, and I want you to write me a letter.' He knew I could write, because I had told him so, and had told all my companions so, for this I found I must do, otherwise they would never be aware of

it; for, not knowing how to write themselves, how could they comprehend that I knew? 'I want to send a messenger back to my castle,' said my good knight, 'and I want him to carry a straight and fair message, which he can not do if I send it by word of mouth. So you must write what I wish to say in a letter to my seneschal, and the messenger shall carry it.' With that, he showed me a little piece of parchment that he had with him, and a phial of ink and a pen, and he bade me sit down and write what he told me to say. I liked not this haste, which gave me no time for study and preparation, and I told him, with due respect, that I could not write unless I had a table on which to lay my parchment. Whereupon he made a man with a cuirass get down on all-fours before me, so that on this man's steel back I could write as on a table. My master then told me to write how that, knowing the enemy would soon reach the spot where we then lay, and feeling the want of a stronger force, he desired his seneschal to send him five more men, and five horses, with arms and all things needful, and also to send therewith a new casque which he expected from the armorer, and a long sword which hung up in the great hall, and divers other things, of which I wot not now. When I came to write down all this, I found myself sorely

troubled, for you must know that to write a letter requires a knowledge of many things. One must know what letters are needed for a word, what order to put them in, and how to make them.

“Some words need a good many letters, and if the letters in a word are not the right letters, and are not set in a befitting order, it will be of no use for any man, even the most learned scholar, to try to tell what that word is. So I soon found that for many of the words I could not remember the letters, and of those letters I did remember there were some that I could not make, for I had forgotten their shape. But I would not tell my master that, for it would have been a sorrowful thing to have fallen from my high place as the most learned person in our company, not to speak of the punishment I might have expected. So I wrote on, making the best words I could devise with the letters at my command, and urging my master to repeat every sentence, so that I should be sure to get it straight and fair; and in that way I learned the whole letter by heart, and read it to him, when I had finished it, so that he was greatly gratified. ‘Let me see the letter, my good Jasto,’ said he; and when he looked at it, he said, ‘The words seem very much like each other’—which was the truth, indeed, for most of them had the same letters in

them, measured out in very much the same measurement. 'But it all looks simple enough,' he went on to say, 'and I greatly desire that I could read it, but that is beyond my powers.' And then he made his mark, which his seneschal well knew, and the letter was done.

"Thereupon he called for a messenger to take it in all haste to his castle, but I told him that he could have no better messenger than I should be, because, having writ the letter, I could read it to the person to whom it was sent, if it should so be that he could not read it himself. 'But old Hubert can read, else I would not send him a letter,' said my lord. But I answered that, if he had never seen my writing, it might be so strange to him that it would take much time for him to understand the proper slope and indication of the letters, and so the re-enforcements might be sorely hindered in their coming. Therefore it was that I was sent, and I so saved my life; for, shortly after, the battle came off, and, if I had been there, I know I should have been killed, as most of my knight's men were. But I was safe in the castle, and when I went back with the men and the horses and the armor, I met my lord coming to his castle, and right glad was he to see me with my company, for he was in such sore plight that he was even afraid of thieves,

although there were but few of them to be met with then, being mostly in the wars. And therefore, I, being fresh and unwounded, took the lead among the men-at-arms, and felt high in my 'lord's favor, and this was far better than being able to scratch off a poor letter that could be read."

"But what said the seneschal to your letter?" asked Louis.

"Oh, nought at all," answered Jasto. "I read it to him out of my head, and showed him his master's mark."

"But did you not feel, all the time, that you were a great trickster and cheat?" said the free-spoken Louis.

"No more than I do now," answered Jasto, "coming here to help you with your letter to your mother, and telling you a story with a moral to it, showing how arduous a thing it is to write a letter, so that you may be ready for your difficulties when they come upon you. And now this pen is done, and it ought to be, for I have put a score of nibs to it, and there is not enough quill left for another one. It may be blunt, but it will make a mark."

"And what am I to write on?" asked Louis.

"I'll find that and the ink this afternoon," said Jasto, "but now I smell dinner."

In the afternoon, Jasto mixed up a black compound with some water, so as to make an ink,—rather thick and gritty, to be sure, but good enough for its purpose,—and he produced a piece of parchment, completely written over on one side. This writing he proceeded to obliterate, as far as possible, by rubbing it with a piece of pumice-stone.

Louis was impatient, and suggested that he might mark out the words on one side and go on writing on the other; but Jasto would not hear to this, for it would argue too great poverty on the part of the *cotereaux* to send a letter on the back of another, and so he rubbed and rubbed, and talked, and came and went, until it was nearly dark, and so the letter was postponed until the next day.

On the morrow, however, Jasto refused to produce the writing materials, because there was to be a grand expedition of the band, which would require nearly all the men; and Michol had said that Louis must be taken along, as he did not wish to leave him behind, guarded only by the few men who would stay at the camp.

“That’s a pretty way to do!” exclaimed Louis. “Suppose I should be killed in this expedition, what will your captain say to my mother then? I am not afraid to go, but I do not want to be

taken for a robber, and be shot with an arrow, or have my head cut off."

"Be not afraid," said Jasto, laughing. "The enemy will not hurt you, if you keep out of the way. You are to be under my special keeping, and I will warrant that the foe shall not kill you."

Early in the morning, nearly the whole of Captain Michol's force, some armed with lances, some with bows and arrows, and others with long knives, or swords of various descriptions, set out, on foot, for a march through the forests. Louis went with them, closely accompanied by Jasto, who never lost sight of him.

On the way, the good-humored robber, who seemed to be of a better class than most of his companions, using more correct language, and behaving himself better in every way, informed Louis of the object of the expedition. About eight or ten miles to the east of the camp of the *cotereaux* there was a chateau, almost as strongly fortified as a castle, the owner of which possessed a great number of hogs. These animals, until within a few days previous, had been confined within close bounds, for fear that they should be stolen. But as no evil-disposed persons had been seen for a long time in the neighborhood, the whole herd had been let out into the adjacent woods, where they would thrive

much better, during the hot weather, than in their former quarters. Michol had been informed that these hogs were ranging through the woods, under the charge of two or three men, and he was now going to try to capture as many of them as possible. He took his large force, not because he expected any opposition from the keepers of the hogs, but because a great many men would be needed to surround and capture the animals, many of which would be lost if the herd should be allowed to scatter itself through the forest.

As they walked along, Louis thought that it was a great pity that the first foray he ever set out upon should be an expedition, in time of peace, to steal pigs; but he considered it wise not to say what was in his mind, for it was the business of these men to steal pigs, or anything else they could lay their hands on,—even boys and borrowed jennets,—and they might not fancy his finding fault with them. He was not afraid of Jasto, with whom he had become very friendly and communicative; but many of the other men looked like fellows whom it would not be at all pleasant to offend. So he went along with the company, and made no objections until he had walked five or six miles through the forest, when he informed Jasto that he was getting very tired, and that he hoped they

would soon come to the end of their journey, so that he could sit down and rest.

"As for that," said Jasto, "the end of your journey will soon come, if the signs ahead of us mean anything. Some of our foremost fellows have come back, and I think they are telling the Captain that the herd is not far ahead of us. And if that be so, it will make our work easier, for the herdsmen will be far from home and can not call for help. You and I will not go up to the field of battle, but will be posted outside, with here and there another brave fellow, to arrest any of the enemy who may take to flight in our direction. So keep up a brave pair of legs for a little while longer, and then you shall have your rest."

Sure enough, in less than a quarter of an hour Jasto received orders to wait with Louis, at the end of a small path through the underbrush, while the rest of the force spread themselves out widely through the forest. Before long a great noise of squealing and shouting was heard in the distance.

"We have come upon them," said Jasto, "and many a good meal of pork shall we have this year."

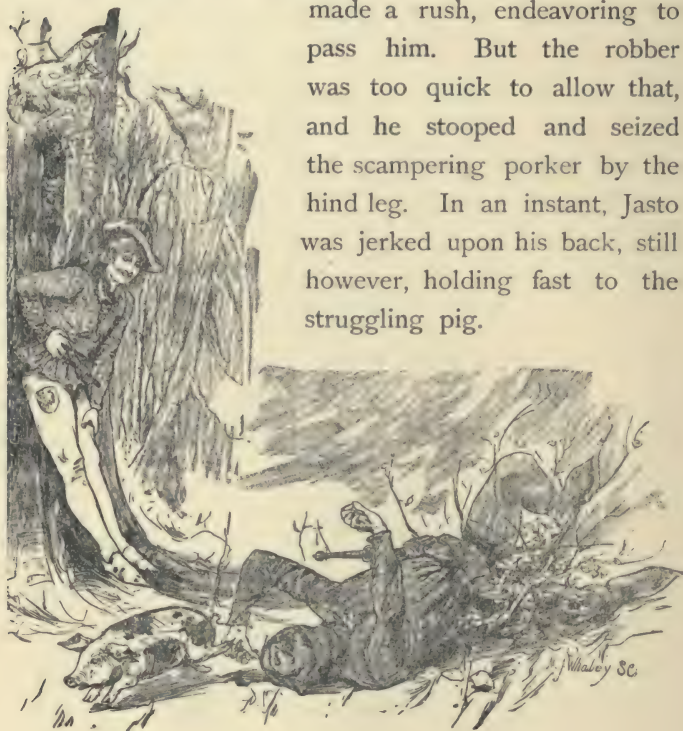
"I hope the poor herdsmen are not getting killed," said Louis.

"Have no fear for them," replied Jasto; they will run away the moment they see one of us. And as

they can not bring help, there will be no Christian blood shed. Look out there! Stand close behind me! Hear you that?"

Louis plainly heard something rushing through the bushes, and in a moment a pig, about half-grown, dashed along the path toward them. When he saw Jasto, he stopped for an instant, and then

made a rush, endeavoring to pass him. But the robber was too quick to allow that, and he stooped and seized the scampering porker by the hind leg. In an instant, Jasto was jerked upon his back, still however, holding fast to the struggling pig.



Louis shouted in laughter, and he enjoyed the fun so much that it was some moments before he considered that the shouting and wriggling Jasto probably wanted his assistance. He then ran up, and, taking hold of the other hind leg of the prisoner, enabled Jasto to get up, and to tie the pig's legs together with a strong cord which he had in his pocket.

"There, now," cried Jasto, with a very red face, "the rest of the pork will be ready to cook or salt down, but this fellow I shall take home to fatten. He is too lean and lively for good eating now."

In less than half an hour the rest of the company appeared, walking in a long line, some of the men bearing each a slaughtered pig, while here and there two fellows carried a larger animal between them. Jasto threw his prize across his shoulders, and, although there was a good deal of struggling on the part of the pig, his captor held him firmly, and carried him thus throughout the whole long tramp back to the camp.

When he reached the huts, Jasto immediately set to work to make a rude pen of stakes and poles, in which he shut up his pig, which was to be thoroughly fattened before sharing the fate of his brethren who had been slain in the forest.

Louis was a very tired boy when he found himself

again in the camp, and he slept until a late hour the next morning; but, as soon as he had had his breakfast and felt fully awake, he went to hunt up Jasto, so that he could begin his letter.

But he found that individual, his well-mended and red-lined clothes exchanged for an indescribably wretched suit, busily engaged, with a large portion of his comrades, in cutting up and curing, in various ways, the pork which had been brought in the day before. The band had so much hog-flesh on hand that they hardly knew what to do with all of it, and they were so busy for several days that Jasto had no time to give to Louis and his literary labors.

But, as soon as the pork business was finished and Jasto was at liberty, Louis set to work in earnest to write his letter to his mother.

Jasto prepared the parchment, nearly obliterating the writing on one side of it, and, the ink and pen being ready, the work began, and a very important work it seemed to be. Louis, of course, was anxious that his first letter to his mother should be a good one, well spelled and well expressed; Jasto continually suggested forcible and high-sounding sentences, containing words which neither Louis nor he could spell; the Captain came several times to the place where the writing was going on, to insist on certain

terms of ransom being clearly stated; and nearly all the men in the band straggled up, one or two at a time, to know how the letter was coming on, and to hear Louis read what he had already written. It was a document of great interest to every one of the robbers, for, if it should succeed in its purpose, it would bring a large sum of money to the band.

At last, after much labor and consultation, Louis finished the letter just as the sun was setting, and as one of the men called out that the evening meal—which that day consisted principally of fresh pork—was ready.

Louis laid his letter, the last words of which were scarcely dry, upon the ground, putting a stone upon it to keep it from blowing away, and ran to get his supper. While he and the rest of the company were busily eating, Jasto's pig broke out of the pen, and, seeing the parchment letter under the tree, devoured it without the slightest hesitation.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Barran had searched the forest on the western side of the highway for nearly three days, and had found no traces of the *cotereaux*, he was obliged to return to Viteau, before entering the woods to the east, to obtain a fresh supply of provisions. He was utterly astounded, of course, when he heard of the flight of the Countess, with nearly all her household; but he was still more surprised, and very much alarmed, when the seneschal told him that, in an hour or so after the departure of the Countess and her party, the chateau had been visited by a large body of armed men, accompanied by several priests, among whom was Brother Anselmo. These men were admitted because the presence of the priests was a token that they were friends, but they behaved very strangely after they entered. One

of them demanded to see the Countess, and when he was told that she had gone away to look for her son, as the seneschal supposed she had gone, he ordered the other men to search the chateau from top to bottom, evidently believing not a word that was told him.

But after every room and every part of the house and grounds had been ransacked, and when it was found that the Countess was really not in the chateau, and that her ladies, and almost all her attendants, as well as the horses in her stables, had gone away, the search was given up, and, after a great deal of talking among themselves, and a great deal of severe questioning of the seneschal and the other servants of the house who had been left behind, the unpleasant visitors departed.

What they wanted, and why they came, the seneschal did not know, any more than he knew why the Countess had left. But Barran was not long in divining the truth. He felt certain that the men with the priests were officers of the Inquisition, and that the Countess had heard of their intended visit, and had escaped from the chateau. Whether or not she was then really out of their power, he did not know; but, as he hoped that her destination was his own castle, the Count determined to hasten home as fast as he could.

After a brief halt for rest and food, Barran, with all his men, hastened back to his castle, where, to his great delight, he found the Countess safe from her pursuers.

But the relief and satisfaction of the poor lady at her present security was entirely overbalanced by the news that her son had not been found. She was in such grief that Barran had not the heart to tell her of the visit of the Inquisitors. He assured her that he would immediately begin the search of the forests on the other side of the road; but, before he started the next day, he held an earnest consultation with Bernard and with Count de Lanne, who was taken into confidence in this most important matter, in regard to the measures to be adopted should the officers of the Inquisition follow the Countess to the castle.

Nothing was agreed upon, excepting that Bernard declared that she should never be given up, so long as life remained in his body; but Barran considered it necessary that he himself should be at home, in case the Inquisitors should come to the castle; and so, after conducting his men to the forest, and instructing them as to the manner in which they should proceed, he returned to the castle, where he remained quietly, without informing the Countess of his presence.

He would have been glad to assist in the search for Louis, for whose safety he was very anxious, but he regarded the mother's position as one which required his personal attention much more than did that of the son. He would have told her everything, and have urged her to leave France, if possible ; but he knew she could not be induced to take a step of the kind until she had seen her son, or had had definite news of him, and so he deemed it unwise to say any thing about the Inquisitors as long as he felt sure that she would go no farther to escape from them. She asked no questions, for her mind seemed entirely occupied by the loss of her boy.

She would not allow Raymond to go with the searching party, for fear she should in some way lose him also ; and this troubled her eldest son greatly until she told him, as she had promised, of the danger with which she was threatened, and which had caused her to leave her home.

This information had a powerful effect upon Raymond. It seemed to make him several years older. At first he scarcely could believe that there were people in the world who could wish to punish his dear mother for believing what she thought right about religious matters ; but when he heard how so many persons had been cruelly tried and punished by the Inquisition for saying and thinking no more

than his mother had said and thought, he saw what peril she was in ; and he determined, like Bernard, that he would never leave her until she should be safe from all her dangers.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Captain Michol heard of the fate of the letter,—and there could be no doubt as to what that fate was, for the pig was found rooting around the spot where the parchment had been left, evidently searching for something else good to eat,—he was very angry. He knew that there was no more parchment in the camp, nor anything else on which a proper letter could be written, and he did not know when or where he could procure any material of the kind. He had made all his arrangements to send the letter, which had now been too long delayed, to Viteau the next day; and this disappointment enraged him very much. He ordered Jasto's pig to be instantly slaughtered, and he told Louis that he would cut off one of his ears and send that to his mother, and then, if a handsome

ransom did not soon arrive, he would cut off the other one and send it also.

Whether or not the Captain was in earnest in making this threat is not to be known ; but it frightened Louis greatly, and he determined that the morning should not find him in the power of a man who would do such terrible things, and he made up his mind to escape that night, no matter what might afterward happen to him.

Accordingly, when Jasto was fast asleep, poor little Louis slipped quietly past him and made his way into the forest. He pushed blindly through the thickets and undergrowth, not knowing in what direction he was going—only anxious to get away as far as possible from the cruel Captain. It was very dark, and he frequently came violently against a tree, or stumbled over tangled vines and bushes, scratching his hands and face and bruising his body ; but he still pressed on, wherever he could push himself through the bushes. When daylight should appear he hoped to be able to make his way to the high-road, and, once there, he felt sure he could walk to Viteau.

But, after hours of toilsome and painful struggling through the pathless underbrush, he found that, even by the increasing light, he could not discover, although he searched diligently, any sign or indication of a passage through the thicket. He even climbed a

tree, but could see nothing except trees and bushes—the latter extending, in what seemed like impenetrable masses, in every direction.

Almost tired to death, he sat down at the foot of the tree he had climbed, and in a few minutes was fast asleep. He slept for hours, and it was after noon when he was awakened by some one laughing very close to him.

Louis opened his eyes with a start, and there was Jasto, who at that moment laughed again. The boy sprang up with a cry, and was about to plunge into the bushes, but the robber seized him by the arm.

“No, no, my good Sir Page,” said Jasto. “Don’t lead me over any more such wretched ways as you have led me this morning. I’ve had enough of them.”

“Oh, Jasto!” cried Louis, “you are not going to take me back?”

“I don’t know,” said the robber, “what I shall do with you, but I certainly shall not take you back the way you came. Where you crept under the bushes, I had to break through them. I never saw such a fellow for hiding. How do you suppose I found you?”

“I don’t know,” said Louis.

“I found you,” said Jasto, “by not looking for you. The rest of our men—and nearly all of them turned out to search for you, when we found you had run

away—scattered themselves about in all directions, to see if they could catch a glimpse of *you*. I did nothing of that kind. I knew that if a boy like you were to crouch under a thick bush, I could not see him. So I looked for little bits of blue silk from a pair of trunk hose, and little shreds of purple cloth from a tunic that I knew of. I saw a bit of the silk on some briars when I started out, and I knew I should find more. I lost your track many times, but every now and then a bit of rag on a thorn would encourage me; and so, at last, I came up to the gallant young page who was marking his way with pieces of silk and costly cloth. It made me laugh to think how truly these rags had led me to him."

"I am glad, Jasto," said Louis, "that you found me, and not one of the other men. I don't believe you will make me go back to the Captain to have one of my ears cut off. You will show me the way to go home, and I promise you, if you will do that, that my mother will send you a good sum of money, quite as much as she would have sent to the Captain if she had got my letter and had ransomed me."

"I am not sure about that," said Jasto, "but I have been thinking over the matter, and it may be that I shall not take you back to our camp. I have a kindly feeling for you, Sir Page. First, because I think you are a lad of spirit, as I used to be; and

second, because my pig ate your letter, and so brought your trouble on you. Therefore, I feel bounden to help you out of it. But, if I send you to your mother, she may forget my sole share in your rescue and return, and may send the ransom-money to our company, when it will be so divided and shared, and measured into parts, that I shall get very little of it. So I think I shall take you to your mother, and then I shall get all the ransom myself, and not be obliged to share it with any one. And I am sure the good lady, your mother, will give more to him who brings you back than to him who has merely carried you away."

"Indeed would she!" cried Louis, more than delighted at the prospect of being taken directly to his home.

"Well, then," said Jasto, "take you this piece of bread, which I put in my pocket before I set out this morning, and when you have eaten it, you will be strong enough, mayhap, to go on to your mother's chateau, though it is still a good distance from here; and I promise you that I shall not lead you through such rough ways as you led me. But we must be careful, for, if we meet any of my good comrades, there will be an end of our plan."

When Louis had finished eating,—and, coarse and hard as the bread was, he devoured every morsel,

for it was his breakfast and his dinner,—the two started off for Viteau. Louis supposed that they would try to reach the main road as soon as possible; but Jasto assured him that he had no idea of doing that, for the woods would be occupied, at various points along the road, by the *cotereaux*, who would expect the fugitive boy to take the highway as soon as he could find it. Instead of that, Jasto intended to slyly make his way, through the woods, to the nearest point to Viteau, and then to strike across the country to the chateau.

Jasto was an expert and experienced woodsman, and he found paths where Louis would never have imagined they could exist; and with great care and caution, and frequent halts for outlook and listening, he led the boy through the devious mazes of the forest, without meeting one of his comrades. About dark they reached the edge of the forest, and then they cautiously made their way to the chateau, where they arrived late in the night.

It would be hard to express the consternation of Louis—and that of Jasto was almost as great—at finding that the Countess had gone away; that Barran had been there that day, returning from a search for his lost page, but had almost immediately set out for his castle, and that a body of strange men, accompanied by priests, had been searching the house for his mother only the night before.

Poor Louis, who could not imagine what all this meant, and who was bewildered and astounded at seeing the happy home he had always known deserted by every one excepting the seneschal and a few servants, desired nothing so much as to go immediately to his mother. But this Jasto would not have allowed, had it been possible, for the boy was nearly exhausted by fatigue and want of food. After some supper had been prepared for the two travelers, and Louis had eaten as much as Jasto thought good for him, the robber accompanied his young companion to the room he had been used to occupy with his brother Raymond, and, after seeing him safely in bed, lay down on the floor across the door-way, and went to sleep himself. It was evident that he intended to take good care that Louis should not leave him this time until he had conducted him into his mother's presence.

The seneschal was rather surprised at the actions of this man, who announced himself as a friend to the boy, and one who had saved him from the robbers who had captured him; but, as he and Louis seemed on very friendly terms, the old man made no objection to anything that Jasto said or did.

In the morning, Louis insisted upon an early start for Barran's castle; but, although Jasto was now perfectly willing to go, he was afraid to do so, for

there was no other road but the one which led through the woods, and on that he certainly would be seen by some of the *cotcreaux*, who would keep the road under constant watch. To make his way with the boy through the woods on the west of the road would be almost impossible, for he was not familiar with that part of the forest, and did not know the paths; and Louis would of a certainty be tired out long before he could reach the castle, which was distant almost a day's journey for a horse.

But fortune favored him, for, after he had spent most of the day in endeavoring to impress these things on the mind of the impatient Louis, and in making efforts to find some one who would be willing to go to the castle and inform the Countess of her son's arrival at Viteau, there came to the chateau a party of horsemen who had been sent by Barran to see if anything had been heard from the boy at his home, the party in the eastern woods, having, so far, met no traces of his captors.

The course was now easy enough, and the next day Barran's men set out for the castle, taking with them the happy Louis and Jasto, who felt no fear of capture by his former comrades now that he was escorted by a body of well-armed men.

The scene at the castle, when Louis arrived was a joyous one. The Countess forgot all her troubles and

fears about herself, in her great happiness for the return of her son; and even Raymond ceased to think, for a time, of his mother's danger, so glad was he to see his dear brother again. Every one at the castle, indeed, was in a state of great delight, for Louis was a general favorite, and few persons had expected to see him again.

Among the most joyful of his welcomers was Agnes. She listened to his story with the greatest eagerness, and, when he began to lament that he had lost her horse, she exclaimed:

"We don't think much about horses, my father and I, when we are afraid that we have lost boys. It is easy enough to get another Jennet, and, before many years, this one would have been too small for me. Do you think he is in a comfortable place?"

"I don't know," answered Louis. "I did not see where they took him."

"At any rate," said the girl, promptly, "the thieves can not ride him in the forest, and so he will not be worn out by hard work. But we won't talk about him any more. And your brother's new falcon is gone, too, I suppose."

"Oh, yes," said Louis, ruefully. "But he will not grieve about that, for he did not know he was going to have one. I thought of that a good many times, when I was among the robbers. If he had been

expecting it, things would have been a great deal worse than they are now."

"Of course he did not expect the bird," said the girl, "but he knows you have lost it, for everybody was told that it was to carry him a new falcon that you left the castle. But he never will scold you for not bringing it, and so we need not say anything more about it. But he must wonder that you were bringing him a falcon; for how could you know he had none, when you left your mother's house before anything was said about his bird having been lost? He must suspect you had something to do with it."

"Of course he does," said poor Louis. "I intended to tell him all about it when I should give him the new falcon; but it will be harder to do it now."

"Don't you say a word about it," said Agnes, who was really a kind-hearted girl, although she liked to talk about everything that was on her mind. I'll tell him myself. It will be easy enough for me to do it, and I can tell him better than you can, anyway."

She did tell Raymond all about it, dwelling with much earnestness on Louis's sorrow for his fault, and his great desire to make amends for it; but she found that Raymond cared very little about falcons. His mind was occupied with weightier matters.

"Louis is a good fellow and a true one," he said, "although he often plays wild pranks, and the only



THE COUNTESS SENT FOR JASTO AND THANKED HIM WARMLY.

reason I am sorry that he lost my bird is that it caused him such danger, and all of us such grief."

"I like Louis better than Raymond," said Agnes to herself. "Raymond talks so much like a man, and he isn't half so glad as he ought to be, now that his brother is saved from those dreadful robbers. If I were in his place, I'd be singing and dancing all the time."

The Countess sent for Jasto, and thanked him warmly and earnestly for bringing her son to her, instead of taking him back to the *cotereaux*.

"If I could do it now," she said, "I should reward you handsomely for what you have done for me; but, as I left my chateau for this place very suddenly, I have no money with me. However, as soon as I shall have opportunity to send for some, I shall more than pay you for the trouble you have taken. Meantime, as your conduct shows that you wish to leave your companions and give up your evil ways, you can remain here, and I shall see that you receive fair treatment and are well employed." And then, with a few more gracious words, she dismissed him.

This was all very pleasant, for the Countess spoke so sweetly and looked so good that it greatly gratified Jasto to have her talk to him so kindly, and thank him for what he had done; but still he was not satisfied. He had expected to make a regular bargain

about a ransom, and hoped that Louis would have told his mother how much Michol was going to charge for his return; but he found the boy had never mentioned the matter, and he did not feel bold enough, in his first interview with the Countess, to do it himself. He knew that he would be rewarded, but he felt sure that a lady would have no idea of the proper sum to pay for a page's ransom. If the pig had not eaten the letter her son had written, she would have been astonished indeed. He would wait, and, when the proper time came, he would let it be known that he expected ransom-money just as much as if he had kept the boy in some secret spot, and had made his mother send the sum required before her son was restored to her. Meanwhile, he was perfectly willing to remain in the service of the good Countess, and the first thing he asked for was a suit of clothes not composed of patches sewn together with bright red silk. And that he received without delay.

Now that Louis was safe at the castle, the minds of the Countess and her friends were occupied with the great question of her safety. It was not to be expected that the officers of the Inquisition would give up their attempts to arrest the lady; and although Barran's castle and Barran's forces might be strong enough to hold her securely and to drive back her

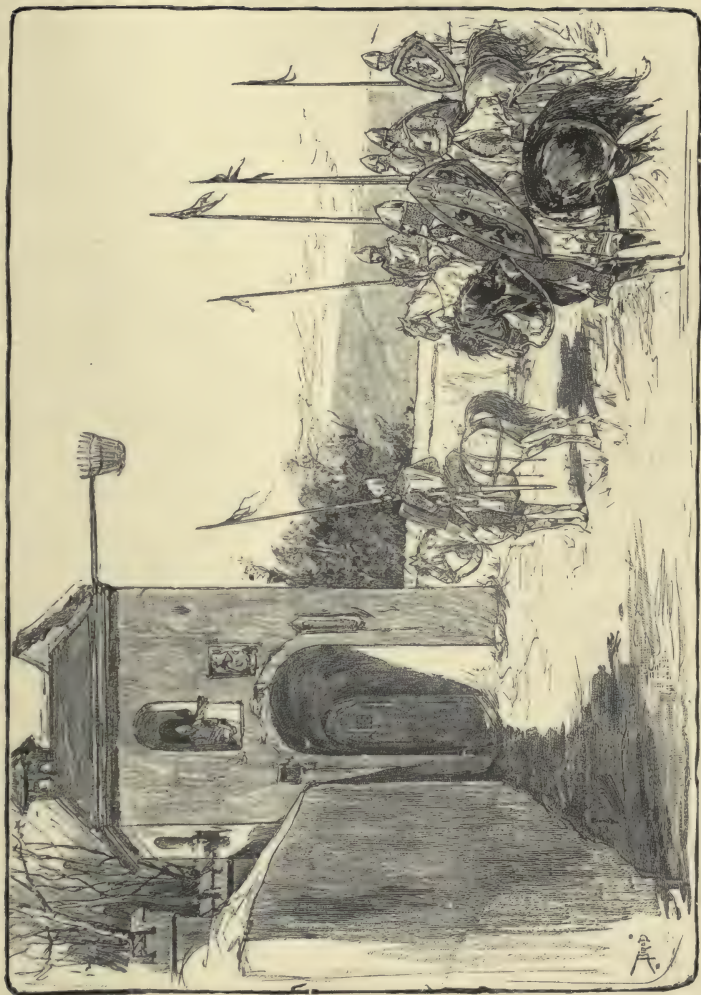
persecutors, a contest of this kind with the Church was something not to be desired by the Count nor by his friends. Barran and Lanne were both of the opinion that the safest refuge for the Countess would be England; but a secret journey there would be full of hardships, and might compel her to give up all her property, and to be separated from her sons.

It was hard to decide what to do, and at any day the officers of the Inquisition might appear at the gates of the castle

CHAPTER X.

A FEW days after the arrival of Louis and Jasto at the castle of Barran, the Countess found it necessary to send to Viteau for some clothing and other things which were needed by herself and her ladies, for they had brought very little with them in their hasty flight from the chateau.

A trusty squire—not Bernard, for he would not leave his mistress for so long a time as a day and night—was sent, with a small, but well-armed body of men, to convey to the castle the property desired by the Countess, and to give some orders to the seneschal in charge. When the party reached the chateau, early in the evening, the squire was greatly surprised to find that he could not enter. The gates were all closed and barred securely, and no answer came to his calls and shouts to the inmates.



A SMALL WINDOW WAS OPENED.

At length, a small window in the principal gate was opened, and a man's head, wearing a helmet with the visor down, appeared in the square aperture.

"Which of the varlets that we left here are you?" cried the angry squire. "And what are you doing with the armor of the Countess on your rascally head? Did you not know me when I called to you, and when are you going to open this gate for us?"

"I am not any man's varlet," said the person in the helmet, "and you did not leave me here. I wear this helmet because I thought that some of your impatient men might thrust at me with a spear, or shoot an arrow at me when I should show my head. I did not know you when you called, for I never heard your voice before, and I am not going to open the gate for you at all."

The squire sat upon his horse, utterly astounded at this speech, while his men gathered around him, wondering what strange thing they next would hear.

"Who, then, are you?" cried the squire, when he had found his voice, "and what are you doing here?"

"I have no objection," said the other, "to make the acquaintance of any man who wants to know me, and to tell him what I do, if it be, in any way, his business. I am Michol, the captain of the good and true band of *cotereaux* who for some time past have lived in this forest, near by; and what I am doing here

is this: I am dwelling in this goodly chateau, in peace and comfort, with my men."

The squire turned and looked at his followers.

"What think you," he said, "does all this mean? Is this a man gone crazed?"

"Not so," said the man with the helmet; "not so, my good fellow. I may have done crazy deeds in by-gone days, but this is the most sane thing I ever did in all my life. If you should care to hear the whole story, straight and true,—and I should like much to tell it to you, that you may take it to your mistress,—come closer and listen."

The squire, anxious enough to hear, rode close to the gate; the men crowded near him, and Michol, for it was really the captain of the *cotereaux*, told his story.

"I am going to make this tale a short one," he said, "so that you can remember it, and tell it clearly, all of you. When the boy, son of the Countess of Viteau, was stolen from us——"

"Stolen!" ejaculated the squire.

"Yes," said the other, "that is the word. We captured the youngster fairly on the road, and held him for fitting and suitable ransom; and before we had opportunity to acquaint his friends with his whereabouts, and with the sum demanded for him, he was basely stolen by a traitor of our company, and

carried away from us, thus cheating us of what was our fair and just reward."

"Reward!" exclaimed the squire. "Reward for what?"

"For treating him well and not killing him," said Michol, coolly. "When I found out the base deed that had been done to us," he continued, "I gathered all my men, together with another band of brave fellows, who gladly joined us, and I came boldly here to demand the ransom for the boy, and the body of the wretched villian who stole him away. And when I found no boy, and no traitor, and no Countess, and no one in the whole chateau but an old man and some stupid varlets, I blessed my happy stars, and took possession of the whole domain. And this I shall hold, occupy, and defend, until the Countess, its former mistress, shall send to me one hundred silver marks, together with the person of the traitor Jasto. When these shall have been fairly delivered to me, I shall surrender the chateau, and honorably depart, with all my men."

"You need expect nothing of that kind," cried the squire. "Count de Barran and the good knights with him, when they hear this story, will come down upon you and drive you out with all your men; and never a piece of money, gold or silver, will you gain by this deed—unless, indeed, it shall be such as you shall find here."

"I shall have my money," replied Michol; "but until I hear that my just demands are denied, I shall break no bars or locks to look for it. My men and I will live merrily on the good stores of the Countess; but while we hold this place as warranty for her son's ransom, we shall not sack or pillage. But if your lord and his knights should come to drive me out, they would find more good soldiers here than they can bring, for in times of peace we are strong, and the lords of the land are weak, unless, indeed, they keep retainers and men-at-arms for mere show and ostentation. My men are well armed, too, for the Count of Viteau kept his armory well furnished, as became a valiant knight and a leader of fighting men. So, therefore, if Barran shall come to give us foul blows, instead of fair words and just deeds, he will get blow for blow, and harder blows, methinks, than he can strike; and if it should be, by strange fortune, that he drive us out, he would drive us only from the blazing ruins of this chateau.* All this I tell you, my good squire, that you may tell it to Barran and the Countess. Think you you will remember it?"

*Such was the lawlessness of the times, when people had to rely on themselves for protection and defense, that a deed like the taking of this chateau would probably meet with no immediate punishment, unless it were inflicted by the injured owner or his friends.

"Indeed will I," said the squire. "Such words can not easily be forgotten. But then I truly think——"

"No more of that!" interrupted Michol. "I do not care what you think. Hear, remember, and tell. That is enough for you in this matter. And, now, what brought you here? You did not come to bring word, good or bad, to me?"

"Indeed I did not," said the other, "for I knew not you were here. I came, at the command of the Countess of Viteau, to get for her certain garments and needful goods belonging to herself and ladies, which she could not, with convenience, take with her to the castle, but which, I suppose, if your tale be true, I shall go back without."

"Not so," said Michol. "I war not on fair ladies, until they themselves declare the war. You shall come in, and take away what your lady needs. That is, if you fear not to enter alone."

These words made the squire turn pale. He was afraid to trust himself, alone, inside the walls of the chateau court-yard, but he was ashamed to own it—ashamed that his own men should see his fear, or that Michol should see it. And so, out of very cowardice and fear of mockery, he did a thing which was exceedingly brave, and entered by the wicket in the gate, which Michol opened for him.

Inside the court and in the chateau, the squire saw,

as Michol was very glad to have him see, hundreds of *cotereaux*, well armed, and in a good state of discipline, and he felt sure, at last, that the tale he had been told was true.

The articles he had been sent for were all delivered to him, and properly packed by Michol's men for conveyance on the baggage-horses that had been brought for the purpose. Then the goods were carried out, and the squire was allowed to depart, without hurt or hindrance.

Provisions were sent outside the gates for the squire and his men and horses, and that night they bivouacked by the roadside.

The next morning they rode back to Barran's castle, and the squire delivered to the Countess the property he had been sent for, and told the wonderful tale that the captain of the *cotereaux* had instructed him to tell.

CHAPTER XI.

THE news of the occupation of Viteau by a band of robbers, occasioned, as well might be supposed, the greatest astonishment at the castle of Barran. At first, every one, from the Lord of the castle to the lowest varlet, was loud in favor of an immediate march upon the scoundrels, with all the force that could be gathered together on the domain. But after Barran had held a consultation with the Countess, Hugo de Lannes, and the very sensible and prudent Bernard, he determined not to be too hasty in this important matter. If the story of the squire who had been sent to Viteau was true,—and there was no reason to doubt it,—it would require every fighting man on the estates of the Count de Barran to make up a force sufficiently strong to compel the *cotereaux* to leave the chateau; and if this force should not be large

enough to completely surround and invest the place, the captain of the robbers might make good his threat of burning the chateau and retreating to the forest, which he could probably reach in safety, if the retreat should be made in the night.

But, even if the Count had been able to raise men enough to make a successful attack upon the *cotereaux* at Viteau, he did not wish, at this time, to strip his castle of all its defenders. If it should be concluded that the Countess should endeavor to escape to England, a tolerably strong party might be necessary to conduct her to the coast; and if the officers of the Inquisition should appear at his gates, he would like to be there with enough men to compel at least parley and delay.

It would, also, be difficult to hold the chateau, after it should be taken, during this serious quarrel with the *cotereaux*. If the lady of Viteau had been at home, she might have summoned many of her vassals to her aid, but it was not to be supposed that these people would willingly risk their lives, and expose their families to the vengeance of the robbers, to defend a dwelling which its owner had deserted.

It was, therefore, determined not to attempt, at present, to disturb the *cotereaux* at Viteau, who, as long as their demand for a ransom for young Louis was not positively denied, would probably refrain from

doing any serious injury to the property. When the Countess should be in safety, a force could be raised from some of the estates, and from villages in the surrounding country, to thoroughly defeat the *cotereaux* and to break up their band. Suitable arrangements then could be made to hold and defend the chateau until the Countess or her heirs should come back to take possession.

What was to be done for the unfortunate mother of Raymond and Louis, now became again the great question. Flight to England, which, though a Catholic country, was not under the power of the Inquisition, as were France and some of the neighboring countries, would have been immediately determined upon, had it not been for the great unwillingness of the Countess to consent to separate herself from her sons.

If she should leave France and take her children with her, her property would probably be taken possession of by the Church or the Crown; whereas, if her sons, under a proper guardian, should remain in France, the estate would be considered to belong to them, for they had done nothing to make them forfeit it; and everything could go on as usual, until the friends of the Countess should have opportunity to represent the matter to some of the high authorities of the Church. Then, if she could be released from

the prosecution by the Inquisition, she could return in peace to her home.

On the day after the squire's return from Viteau, and after it had been decided to leave the *cotereaux* in possession for the present, Raymond and Louis, with Agnes, were sitting together at a window in one of the great towers of the castle, talking of the proposed journey of the Countess; Louis had been told the reason of her flight from Viteau, and, of course, Agnes knew all about it.

"If I were the Count de Barran," said Louis, very much in earnest, "I should never make a lady, like our mother, run away to England, nor to any other savage country, to get rid of her enemies. I should fill this castle with soldiers and knights, and I'd defend her against everybody, to the last drop of my blood. Wasn't Barran the brother-in-arms of our father? And isn't he bound, by all his vows, to protect our mother, when her husband isn't here on earth to do it himself?"

"You don't look at things in the right way, Louis," said Raymond. "Of course, the Count would defend our mother against all enemies, for he is a brave and true knight; but we can not say that the priests and officers of the Church are our enemies. Now, if Barran fights the people of the Inquisition, he is fighting the Church, and no Christian knight wants to do that."

"I'd like to know what an enemy is," said Louis, "If he isn't a person who wants to do you an injury; and that, it seems to me, is exactly what these Inquisition people are trying to do to our mother. I shouldn't care whether they belonged to the Church or not."

"Oh, yes, you would," said Raymond, "if you had taken the vows of a Christian knight. The Count will do everything he can to save our mother from these people, but he will not want to fight and slay Church officers, and his men-at-arms would not help him,—I heard Count de Lannes say that,—for whoever should do such a thing would be excommunicated by the Pope of Rome, and would be cast out from all Christian fellowship and all hope of salvation. Our mother would not let any one fight for her, when she should know that such things would happen to him."

"Bernard would fight for her," said Louis; "and so would I."

"And so would I, as well you know," said his brother, "and so would the Count and many another knight, if things came to the worst. They would not stop to think what would happen afterward. But it would be a sad thing to do. It would be much better for our mother to go away, than to put her friends in such jeopardy of their souls. I have heard all this talked about, and I know how hard a thing it is for

the Count to send our mother away. But one thing is certain: when she goes, I go with her. I care not for the domain."

"And I go too!" cried Louis. "Let the robbers and the priests divide Viteau between them. I will not let my mother go among the barbarians without me."

"The English are not barbarians," said Raymond. "There are plenty of good knights and noble ladies at the court of King Henry, and all over the land, too, as I have read."

"I thought they must be savages," said Louis, "because they have no Inquisition. Surely, if England were a Christian land like France, there would be an Inquisition there."

Up to this time Agnes had been silent, eagerly listening to the conversation of the boys. But now she spoke:

"Louis and Raymond!" she cried, "I think it will be an awful, dreadful thing for your poor mother to go to England; I don't care what sort of a country it is, or who goes with her. Isn't there somebody who can make these people stop their wicked doings without fighting them? Can't the King do it?"

"Of course he can," cried Louis. "The King can do anything."

"Perhaps he can," said Raymond. "I spoke to my



AGNES TELLS RAYMOND AND LOUIS OF HER PLAN.

mother about that this morning, and asked her why Count de Barran did not go to the King and beseech him to inquire into this matter, and to see why one of his subjects—as good a Christian as any in the land—should be so persecuted. She said I spoke too highly of her——”

“Which you did not,” cried Louis.

“Indeed, I did not,” continued Raymond. “And then she told me that the mother of our King, Queen Blanche, who has more to do with the affairs of France than her son himself, does not like Barran, who, with our father, opposed her long with voice and sword, in the disputes between Burgundy and the Crown. So it is that he could not go to ask a favor of her son, for fear that it would do us more harm than good.”

“But is he the only person in the world?” cried Agnes. “Why can’t somebody else go. Why don’t you go, Raymond, with Louis—and with me? Let us all three go! We can tell the King what has happened, as well as any one, and the Queen-Mother can not bear a grudge against any of us. Let us go! My father will not say me nay.”

Louis agreed instantly to this glorious plan, and Raymond, after a moment’s thought, gave it a hearty assent.

“We’ll start by the dawn of day to-morrow,” cried Agnes; and away she ran to ask her father if she

might mount a horse, and go with Louis and Raymond to Paris, to see the King.

Strange as it may seem, this wild plan of the children was received with favor by their elders. Something must be done immediately, and the Countess must either leave France, or some powerful aid must be asked for. Measures had been taken to put the matter before some of the high officials of the Church, but it was believed that they would first send for Brother Anselmo and the priests, and would hear their story, before interfering for the Countess; and, therefore, whatever help might be expected in this direction, would probably be much delayed and come too late.

But if the King should desire it, the matter would be instantly investigated, and that was all that the Countess and her friends intended to ask. They felt sure that if some one, more competent and less prejudiced than the two or three monks who had been incensed by their failure to answer her arguments, should examine the charges against her, it would be found that she believed nothing but what was taught by the fathers of the Church, and believed in by all good people who had read what the authors had written.

And who could go with better grace to ask the help of the King—himself young—than these three

young people: two boys who would speak in behalf of their mother, and the young girl, their friend, who might be able to talk with the Queen-Mother, if there should be need of it?

Count Hugo de Lannes readily agreed to take charge of the young ambassadors, if his daughter should be one of them. He was well known in Paris, and could give them proper introduction and guarantee their statements. Thus his assistance would be very great.

It was agreed that by dawn the next morning, just as Agnes had said, the party should start for Paris, and that, until its return, the Countess should postpone her flight from France.

And many earnest prayers were said that night, that nothing evil might happen to the Countess while her two boys should be absent from her.

CHAPTER XII.

THE cavalcade, which started from the castle early the next morning, was a gay and lively one, for everybody seemed to think that it would soon return, with happy news.

At the head rode Count de Lannes, and, at his side, Sir Charles de Villars, a younger knight, visiting at the castle, who had volunteered his services to help defend the party, should it be attacked on the way.

Next came the three young people, each mounted on a small Arabian horse, from the castle stables. After them came two women, in attendance on Agnes; and then followed quite a long line of squires, pages, and men-at-arms, with servants carrying the heavy armor of the two knights, all mounted and armed.

It was calculated that the journey to Paris would

take about four days, if they pressed on as fast as the strength of the horses and that of the young riders would permit; and as it was desirable to be back as soon as possible, they rode away at a good pace.

Some distance in advance of the whole party were two men-at-arms, whose duty it was, when passing through forests, or among rocks and hills, where an enemy might be concealed, to give timely notice of any signs of danger. The Count de Lannes did not expect any attack from robbers, for he felt quite sure that the *cotereaux* who had been in the neighborhood were all engaged in the occupation of Viteau.

But he did not know as much about the robber bands of Burgundy as he thought. A short time before, there had come into the country, between Barran's castle and Viteau, a company of *brabançois*—freebooters of somewhat higher order than the *cotereaux*, who generally preferred to be soldiers rather than thieves, but who, in times of peace, when no one would hire them as soldiers, banded together, stopped travelers on the highway, and robbed and stole whenever they had a chance. They were generally better armed and disciplined, and therefore more formidable, than the *cotereaux*, or the *routiers*, who were robbers of a lower order than either of the other two.

These *brabançois*, when Michol was making up his

force with which to seize and hold the chateau of Viteau, offered to join him, but he declined their proposition, believing that he had men enough for his purpose, and not wishing, in any case, to bring into the chateau a body of fellows who might, at any time, refuse to obey his rule, and endeavor to take matters into their own hands.

The captain of the band of *brabancois*, when he found that he would not be allowed to take part in the ransom speculation at Viteau, moved up nearer the castle of Barran, and sent one of his men, dressed like a common varlet or servant, to take service with the Count, as an assistant in the stables and among the horses. In this occupation he would learn of the intended departure of any party from the castle, and could give his leader such information as he could manage to pick up about the road to be taken, and the strength and richness of the company.

So it was that, on the night of the day on which the expedition to Paris was determined upon, and after orders had been given to have the necessary horses ready early the next morning, this fellow got away from the castle, and told his captain all he knew about the party—who were to go and which way they were going.

It was not likely that the company under the charge of Count de Lannes would carry much money, or

valuable baggage of any sort, and, therefore, the enterprise of waylaying these people on the road did not appear very attractive to the leader of the robbers, until he heard that Louis, and Jasto, who was to go with the boy as servant, were to be of the party. Then he took a great interest in the matter. If he could capture Louis, he could interfere with Michol in getting the ransom he demanded, and so force himself, in this way, into partnership with the prudent captain of the *cotereaux*; and if he could take Jasto, of whose exploits he had heard, he felt sure that Michol would pay a moderate ransom to get possession of that traitor to his cause and his companions.

Therefore, principally to capture, if possible, these two important and perhaps profitable personages, the band of robbers set out before daylight, and took a good position for their purpose on that road to Paris.

It was nearly noon when the cavalcade of our friends entered a wide and lonely forest, where the road was thickly overgrown, on each side, with bushes and clambering vines. It was an excellent place for an ambuscade, and here the *brabancois* were ambuscaded.

Count Hugo de Lannes was a prudent man, and he proceeded slowly, on entering the forest, giving orders to his scouts to be very careful in looking out for signs of concealed marauders.

He also called up the men who carried the heavy armor, and he and Sir Charles proceeded to put on their helmets and their coats of mail, so as to be ready for anything which might happen during their passage through the forest.

They were prepared none too soon, for the scouts came riding back, just as Count Hugo had exchanged his comfortable cap, or bonnet, for his iron head-covering, with the news that men were certainly concealed in the woods some hundred yards ahead.

Quickly the two knights, with the assistance of their squires, finished putting on their armor, and each hung his battle-ax at his saddle-bow. Their long swords they wore at all times when riding. Then Count Hugo, turning, gave rapid orders for the disposition of his force.

Part of the men-at-arms, all ready for battle, drew up before the young travelers, and part took their place in their rear. On either side of each of the boys, and of Agnes and her women, rode a soldier in mail, holding his shield partly over the head of his charge. Thus each of these non-combatants was protected by two shields, and by the bodies of two mail-clad men, from the arrows which might be showered upon them should a fight take place.

All these arrangements were rapidly made, for the men of the party were well-trained soldiers, and then

Count Hugo and Sir Charles rode forward to see what they could see.

They saw a good deal more than they expected. As they went around a slight bend in the road, they perceived, a short distance ahead, three mounted men in armor, drawn up across the road. Behind them were a number of other men, with spears and pikes. And in the woods, on either side, were a number of archers, who, though they could not be seen, made their presence known by a flight of arrows, which rattled briskly on the armor of our two horsemen, and then fell harmless to the ground.

If this volley and this brave show of force were intended to intimidate the travelers, and to cause them to fall back in confusion, it did not have the desired effect.

Turning to their squires, who followed close behind them, the two knights called for their lances, and when, almost at the same instant, these trusty weapons were put into their hands, they set them in rest, and, without a moment's hesitation, charged down upon the three horsemen.

Count Hugo was an old soldier, and had been in many a battle, where, fighting on the side of the Crown, he had met in combat some of the bravest soldiers of France and many of the finest knights of England, whom King Henry III. had sent over to aid the

provinces which were resisting Queen Blanche; and Sir Charles, although a younger man, had met and conquered many a stout knight in battle and in tournament.

Therefore, although the *brabancois* horsemen were good, strong soldiers, and well armed, and although all three of them put themselves in readiness to receive the charge of the knights, they could not withstand or turn aside the well-directed lances of these veteran warriors, and two of them went down at the first shock, unhorsed and helpless.

The other man, reining back his horse a little way, charged furiously on Count Hugo, who was nearest him; but the latter caught the end of his lance on his shield, and then, dropping his own lance, he seized his battle-ax, rose in his stirrups, and brought the ponderous weapon down upon the iron-clad head of his assailant, with such a tremendous whang that he rolled him off his horse at the first crack.

Upon this, both knights were attacked at once by the spearmen and other men on foot, but so completely and strongly were the Count and Sir Charles clad in their steel mail that their opponents found no crevice or unguarded spot through which their rapidly wielded weapons could penetrate.

But the knights gave them little time to try the

strength of their armor, for whirling their battle-axes over their heads, and followed by their squires, they charged through the whole body of the foot-soldiers, and then, turning, charged back again, driving the *brabançois* right and left into the woods.

Meantime, all had not been quiet in the rear. The captain of the robbers, as soon as he had seen the knights engaged with his picked men, had come out of the woods with a strong force of his followers on foot, and had made a vigorous attack on our young travelers and their attendants.

Here the fighting was general and very lively. Arrows flew; swords, spears, and shields rattled and banged against each other; horses reared and plunged; the women screamed, the men shouted, and Raymond and Louis drew the small swords they wore, and struggled hard to throw themselves into the middle of the fight.

But this was of no use. Their mailed and mounted guardians pressed them closely on either side, and protected them from every blow and missile.

Little Agnes was as pale as marble. Every arrow, as it struck against the shields and armor about her, made her wink and start, but she sat her horse like a brave girl, and made no outcry, though her women filled the air with their screams.

There were so many of the *brabançois*, and they

directed their attacks with such energy on the one point, that it seemed for a time as if they certainly must get possession of one or all of the children. Three men had pulled aside the horse of Louis's protector on the left, and others were forcing themselves between the soldier and the boy, with the evident intention of dragging the latter from his horse.

But the fight at the head of the line was over sooner than the captain of the robbers expected it would be. His men had scarcely reached Louis's side when Count Hugo and Sir Charles came charging back.

Straight down each side of the road they came. Their own men, seeing them come, drew up in a close column along the middle of the road, and before the *brabancois* knew what was going to happen, the two knights were upon them. Standing up in their stirrups, and dealing tremendous blows with their battle-axes as they dashed along, they rode into the robbers on each side of the road, cutting them down, or making them wildly scatter into the woods. As the knights passed, some of the men-at-arms left their line and, rushing into the woods, drove their enemies completely off the field.

At least they supposed that this was the case; but, when Count Hugo and Sir Charles had turned and had



SIR HUGO AND SIR CHARLES CHARGE THE ROBBERS.

ridden back to the young people and the women, and were anxiously inquiring if any of them had been injured during the affray, a cry from Louis directed everybody's attention to a new fight, which was going on at the rear of the line.

"Jasto!" cried Louis. "They are taking Jasto!"

The boy had happened to look back, and saw his friend of the robber-camp, whose horse had been killed, struggling on foot with four men, one of whom was the captain of the *brabancois*. They were, apparently, endeavoring to drag him into the bushes; Jasto, who was a very stout fellow, was holding back manfully, but the others were too strong for him, and were forcing him along. No one of the Count's party was near, except a few men who had charge of the baggage horses, and these were too busy with their frightened animals to take any notice of the re-appearance of some of the robbers.

"Help him!" cried Louis. "Don't let them take Jasto away!"

Count Hugo turned, as he heard the boy's cry, but little Agnes was close by his side, trying to get her arms around his iron neck, and several horsemen were crowded up near him, so that he could not clearly see what was going on in the rear. A few of the men-at-arms saw the affair, and rode toward the scene of the unequal contest, but Jasto would certainly have been

dragged into the thicket before they could have reached him.

Sir Charles, however, was sitting on his horse, on the outside of the group around the children, and when he heard the alarm and saw the struggle, he immediately galloped to the rear. He did not know who Jasto was, but he saw that one man was contending with four others, whom he perceived, by their appearance and arms, to be members of the robber band. As he rode, he put his hand on his long sword to draw it, but he instantly saw that, if he struck at any one in that twisting and writhing knot of men, he would be as likely to kill the Count's follower as one of the robbers; and so he dashed up, and seized Jasto by the collar with his mailed hand. Then, reining in his horse vigorously, he suddenly backed. The jerk he gave in this way was so powerful that it almost pulled Jasto out of the hands of his captors. He was so far released, indeed, that, had the right hand of Sir Charles been free, he would have been able to cut down the robbers.

But as he still held Jasto in his iron grasp, and prepared to back again, the robber captain, seeing that, in a moment, his captive would be torn from him, and infuriated by the idea that he would lose everything, even the chance of some ransom money from the captain of the *cotereaux*, drew from his belt a great, heavy knife, almost as long as a sword and very broad,

and with this terrible weapon aimed a blow at Jasto's head.

"Traitor!" he cried. "If I can't take you, you can take that!"

But Jasto did not take anything of the kind; for, at the instant that the robber made the blow, two arrows from the archers, who were coming up, and who saw that the only chance of saving Jasto was a quick shot, struck the robber captain in the side of the head, and the knife dropped harmlessly by Jasto's side, while the robber fell back dead. Instantly the other *brabancois* took to their heels, and Sir Charles released the red and panting Jasto.

"Heigho!" cried the knight. "Surely I cannot mistake that round face and those stout legs! This must be Jasto; my old follower and man of learning! Why, good letter writer, I knew not what had become of you, and I have often missed you sorely."

Jasto recognized his old master, and, indeed, he had recognized him as soon as he had seen him in Barran's castle, but he had not wished to make himself known, fearing that Sir Charles might interfere in some way with his plan of demanding a reward for the return of Louis. Now, he would have spoken, but he was too much exhausted and out of breath to say a word. He merely panted and bobbed his head, and tried to look grateful for his deliverance.

"No need of speaking now," said the knight, laughing. "When the breath comes back into your body, I will see you again, and hear your story. And, I doubt not, I shall soon have need to call on you to use your pen and ink for me. If we stay long in Paris, I surely shall so need you."

But now orders were given to form into line and move onward, and Sir Charles galloped up to his place by Count Hugo. The order of marching was taken up as before, and the party, leaving the dead and wounded *brabancois* to be cared for by their companions, who were doubtless hiding in the forest near by, rode cautiously on until they cleared the woods, and then they proceeded on their way as rapidly and comfortably as possible. But few of the men-at-arms had been wounded, and none seriously.

The two boys and Agnes were in high good spirits as they galloped along. Agnes was proud of her father's bravery and warlike deeds, and Raymond and his brother were as excited and exultant as if they had won a victory themselves. Louis would have ridden back to see if his friend Jasto had been injured, but this was not allowed. He was told that the man was safe and sound, and had to be satisfied with that assurance.

As for Jasto himself, he rode silently among the baggage men, having been given a horse captured from the *brabancois*.

For once in his life, he was thoroughly ashamed of himself, and two things weighed upon his mind. In the midst of his struggles with the robbers, and when he had felt certain that they would overpower him and take him back to Michol, by whom he would be cruelly punished and perhaps slain, he had heard that shrill young voice calling for help for Jasto.

"And yet," he said to himself, "I am following that boy about and keeping in his company, solely that I may, some day, have the chance of claiming pay for freeing him from the *cotereaux*, to which bad company I should have gone back this day if it had not been for him. For had he not called for help none would have come to me. I owe him my freedom now, and as he is worth surely twice as much as I am, I will charge his friends but half the sum I had intended. And I shall think about the other half. But a poor man must not let his gratitude hinder his fortune. I shall think of that too.

"But as for Sir Charles, who has saved my life to-day, and who was ever of old a good master to me, I shall never deceive him more. I shall either tell him boldly that I can not write a letter any more than he can himself, or I shall learn to read and write. And that last is what I shall surely do, if I can find monk or clerk to teach me and he ask not more pay than I have money."

With these comforting resolutions Jasto's face brightened up, and raising his head, as if he felt like a man

again, he left the company of the baggage, and rode forward among the men-at-arms.

That night our travelers rested in a village, and the next day they came to the river Yonne, along the banks of which their road lay for a great part of the rest of their journey.

They passed through Sens, a large town, in which there lived a bishop, to whom their errand might have been made known had not there been reason to fear that such an application might injure the cause of the Countess more than it would benefit it, and then they crossed the Seine and passed through Melun and several small towns and villages; and, late in the afternoon of the fourth day, they rode into Paris, with dusty clothes and tired horses, but with hearts full of hope.

CHAPTER XIII.

IT MUST not be supposed that the officers of the Inquisition and the monks of the monastery which, as has been mentioned before, stood a few miles from Viteau, were all this time ignorant of the fact that, when the Countess of Viteau fled from her home, she took refuge in the castle of the Count de Barran.

It was not many days before this was known at the monastery. But the officers had returned to Toulouse to report their failure to secure the person for whom they had been sent; and the monk who was dispatched with the information that the Countess had not fled the country, as was at first supposed, but had taken refuge within a day's ride of Viteau, had a long journey to make to the south of France; while the party which was immediately dispatched by the Inquisition

to the castle of Barran had a long journey to make back to him.

But it finally came, and it was a different party from that which had been sent before. It was larger; it contained many more armed men, and it was under the control of a leader who would not give up the pursuit of the Countess simply because he should fail to find her in the first place in which he sought her.

About the time that the Count de Lannes and our young friends entered Paris, the expedition from the Inquisition at Toulouse reached the great gate of the castle of Barran.

This visit threw the Count, and those of his household who understood its import, into a state of despair almost as great as if it had not been daily feared and expected ever since the Countess had come to the castle.

The Count did not know what to do. He had thought the matter over and over, but had never been able to make up his mind as to what his course would be in case the officers should appear while the Countess remained in his castle. He felt that he could not give up this lady, the wife of his old brother-in-arms, who had come to him for protection; but he could not fight the company that was now approaching, for such an act would have been considered the same thing as fighting Christianity itself.

He was in a sad state of anxiety as he went to the gate to meet, in person, these most unwelcome visitors, and he wished many times, as he crossed the courtyard, that he had yielded to his first impulse and had insisted that the Countess should fly to England while there was yet time.

All that the Count de Barran could do was to detain the officers as long as possible at the gate, and to endeavor to induce them to consent to a friendly council before taking any steps to arrest the Countess. If they would do this, he hoped to prevail upon them to remain at the castle, with the lady really under their watch and guard, until news should arrive from Paris.

But the good squire Bernard acted in a very different way. He did not believe in parleying, nor in councils. Ever since he had come to the castle he had expected this visit, and he had always been ready for it.

In five minutes from the time that he had seen the officials approaching the castle,—and his sharp eyes had quickly told him who they were,—the Countess and her women, the squire himself, and the men-at-arms who had come with them from Viteau, were in their saddles; and, leaving the castle by a lower gate, were galloping along a forest road as fast as their horses' legs would carry them.

The leader of the party from the Inquisition would not parley, and he would listen to no talk of councils. He showed his credentials, and demanded instant entrance; and as soon as he was inside the court-yard, he posted some of his men at every gate.

If the men at the lower gate had put their ears to the ground, they might have heard the thud of horses' feet as the Countess and her party hurried away into the depths of the forest.

The main body of the officers then entered the castle, and the leader demanded to be conducted to the Countess of Viteau. The Count de Barran did not accompany him and his men as they mounted the stairs, but, downcast and wretched, he shut himself in a lower room.

In a very short time, however, the sound of running footsteps and a general noise and confusion brought him quickly into the great hall, and there he learned that the Countess was not in her apartments, and that the Inquisitors were looking for her all over the castle. He instantly imagined the truth, and a little inquiry among his people showed him that he was right, and that the Countess had been carried off by Bernard.

"A trusty and noble fellow!" said Barran to himself, almost laughing with delight at this sudden change in the state of affairs. "But what will he do? So small a party, unprepared for a long journey, could

not get out of the country, and these people here, as soon as they find that the Countess has really gone, will make pursuit in every direction. And if they overtake her it will be all the worse for the poor, poor lady."

Barran was right. When the Inquisitors had made a rapid but thorough search of the castle, and when the angry leader had examined some of the servants and had become convinced that the Countess had again fled, almost from under the very hands of her pursuers, he sent out parties of his horsemen on every road leading from the castle, with orders to thoroughly search the surrounding country, and to make all possible inquiries of persons by whom the fugitives might have been seen. The leader himself remained at the castle, to receive reports and to send out fresh horsemen in any direction which might seem necessary. It was impossible that a lady like the Countess could have the strength and endurance to ride so far that his tough and sturdy men-at-arms could not overtake her. And if she took refuge in any house, castle, or cottage, he would be sure to find her.

The party of soldiers which left the lower gate of the castle and took the road through the forest were mounted on swift, strong horses, and the Countess and her company were only a few miles ahead of them.

The squire Bernard did not keep long upon the

road he had first taken. He knew that the officers would probably pursue him this time, and he had seen that their body was composed of many well-mounted men. So he felt that he must bring into play, not only the fleetness of his horses, but his knowledge of the country, if he hoped to escape the soldiers who would be sent after him.

Bernard did know the country very well. He had been born in this part of Burgundy, and had, in youth and manhood, thoroughly explored these forests, not only after deer and other game, but in expeditions with his master and Barran against parties of *cotereaux* and other thieves who at various times had been giving trouble in the neighborhood.

About four miles from the castle Bernard turned sharply to the left, and rode into what, in the rapidly decreasing daylight, the Countess thought to be the unbroken forest. But it was in reality a footway wide enough for a horse and rider, and along this narrow path, in single file, the party pursued its way almost as rapidly as on the open road.

They had been riding northward; now they turned to the west, and in a half hour or so they turned again, and went southward, through a road which, though overgrown and apparently disused, was open and wide enough for most of its length to allow two persons to ride abreast.



THE FLIGHT OF THE COUNTESS.

They went more slowly now, for it was quite dark ; but the squire led the way, and they kept steadily on all night.

At daybreak they reached what seemed to be the edge of the wood, and Bernard ordered a halt. Bidding the rest of the company remain concealed among the trees, he dismounted and cautiously made his way out of the forest.

Creeping along for a short distance into the open country, he mounted a little hill and carefully surveyed the surrounding fields and plains. Feeling certain that none of their enemies were near at hand in the flat country before them, Bernard went back to the woods, got on his horse, and, turning to the Countess, he said :

“ Now, my lady, we must make a rapid dash, and in a quarter of an hour we shall be at our journey’s end.”

Without a word the Countess—who had put herself entirely into her faithful squire’s care, and who had found early in the ride that he wished to avoid answering any questions in regard to their destination—followed Bernard out of the forest, and the whole party began a wild gallop across the fields.

For a few minutes they rode in silence, as they had been riding for the greater part of the night, and then the Countess suddenly called out :

"Bernard! Oh, Bernard! Where are we going? That is Viteau!"

"Yes," shouted back the squire. "That is Viteau, and, by your leave, we are going there. For you, it is the safest place in France."

"But the *cotereaux*! The *cotereaux*!" cried the Countess. "It is filled with those wicked men!"

"I hope it is yet filled with *cotereaux*," cried the squire, still galloping on; "for it is those fellows who will make it safe for you. Fear them not, fair lady. They want only your money, and as long as they have a good hope of that they will not harm you nor yield you up to any claimant."

The Countess answered not a word; but very pale, and trembling a little, she rode on, and in a very short time the party drew up before the great gate of Viteau.

"Open!" cried Bernard, "open to the Countess of Viteau!"

Receiving no immediate answer, Bernard shouted again:

"Open! Open quickly! It is the lady of this chateau who asks admittance. She is pursued! Open quickly!"

There was now heard inside a sound of running and calling, and in a few minutes the head of Michol appeared at the window in the gate. Perceiving that

his visitors were but three ladies and half a dozen men, all looking very tired and anxious to enter, and recognizing Bernard, whom he had seen several times and with whose position in the household of Viteau he was quite familiar, he concluded that he could run no risk, and might do himself much good, by admitting the little party; and he therefore ordered the gate to be opened and bade the Countess ride in.

The moment the fugitives had entered the court, and the gate had been closed behind them, Bernard sprang from his horse exclaiming:

“Now, at last, I can breathe at ease.”

The Countess, although a good deal frightened at her peculiar situation, could not help smiling at this speech, considering that they were surrounded by a great crowd of armed men, known to have in their number some of the most notorious robbers in the country, and who were crowding into the court to see the visitors, although keeping, by command of their captain, at a respectful distance.

Bernard now approached Michol, and with the utmost frankness, concealing nothing, he told him all about the troubles of the Countess and why she had fled to his protection.

“As your object,” said the squire, “is the payment of the ransom, for which you have taken this chateau as security, you will not wish to injure that lady by

whom you expect the money to be collected and paid. And, if I mistake not, until the ransom is paid to you, you will not allow that lady to be taken out of your possession and keeping."

"You are a shrewd man, and a knowing one," said Michol, with a smile, "and have judged my temper well. And yet," he said, lowering his voice, "you must have terribly feared those Inquisitors, to bring that lady here."

"Fear them!" said the squire in a voice still lower than the captain's. "Indeed did I fear them. Do you know that they would begin her trial with the torture?"

Even the rough bandit gave a little shudder as he heard these words, and looked at the gentle lady before him.

Advancing to her, and removing the steel cap he wore, he said:

"Fair lady, you are welcome, as far as I have power to bid you welcome, to this chateau. Your apartments have not been molested nor disturbed, and you can take immediate possession of them, with your attendants. And you may feel assured that here you may rest in safety from all attacks of enemies of any sort, unless they come in numbers sufficient to overcome my men and carry these strong defenses. And I promise you that when the matters of ransom shall



MICHIOL WELCOMES THE COUNTESS.

be settled between us, I and my men will march away from your estates, leaving no damage nor injury behind us, excepting your loss of what we have consumed and used for our support and defense."

"Impudent varlet!" said Bernard to himself. "Your hungry rascals have fattened on the possessions of the Countess, and yet you talk in a tone as large and generous as if you gave to her what was your own."

"Sir," said the Countess to Michol, "I accept your offer of protection until I receive tidings of some sort from my lord the King."

"You shall certainly have it, fair dame," said Michol. "My men and I will never stand and be robbed, be the robber who he may."

The Countess bowed her head, and, without having heard all of this remark, rode up to the chateau and entered with her party.

CHAPTER XIV.

AS soon as possible on the day after the arrival of his party in Paris, the Count de Lannes made arrangements for an interview between his young ambassadors and the King.

The seneschal of the palace, to whom Count Hugo was known, gave permission to Raymond, Louis, and Agnes, with their proper attendants, to seek the young King in the woods of Vincennes, where, on fine days, he generally walked with some of his courtiers, after the daily religious services which he always attended. In after years, when he managed the affairs of his kingdom without interference from Queen Blanche, and managed them, too, in such a way as to win for himself the reputation of being the most just and honorable ruler that France or Europe had ever known, Louis the Ninth used to hold regular audiences

in these beautiful woods, where those of his subjects who desired to petition him or speak with him could do so with very little ceremony. And even now the young King generally saw the few persons who asked audience of him in this place, which was already becoming his favorite promenade.

Louis, at the time of our story, was about twenty-two years old, but he had been married at nineteen, and was crowned when he was but twelve. His mother, who had been governing the country so long, still continued to do so, and also governed her son and his wife, as if they had been small children. She did not even allow them to see each other, excepting at such times as she thought fit.

This may have been all very well for the nation, for Queen Blanche was a wise and energetic woman, although very bigoted in regard to religious affairs, but it must have greatly fretted the soul of the young monarch, whose crown was like an expensive toy given to a child, but put up on a high shelf, where he might look at it and call it his own, but must not touch it.

The Count de Lannes knew of all this, but he thought it well that his young people should address themselves to the King, who, being a young person himself, and of a very kind disposition, would be apt to sympathize with them and to take an interest in

their unusual mission. Not being much occupied with state or other affairs, it might happen that he would give his mind to this matter; and if he could do nothing himself he might interest his mother, who could do something.

It was a bright and pleasant day when Raymond, Louis, and Agnes, followed by a lady and a page, with Jasto a little farther behind, and Count Hugo and Sir Charles bringing up the rear at quite a distance, were conducted to the King, who was seated under a large tree, with three or four of his noble attendants standing around him.

When the three children approached him, and bent down on their knees before him, as they had been told they must do, the King gave them a smile of welcome, and bade them stand.

"And now, my little friends," he said, "what is it you would have of me?"

Raymond was a straightforward, honest boy, not backward to speak when he should do so, and it had been arranged that he should be the spokesman. But he had never seen a king, even a young one, and his heart failed him. He looked at Louis, who, though bold enough, could not think of anything but the astounding fact, which had suddenly struck upon his mind, that this king was not old enough to be of any good to them. He looked as young as some of



AGNES MAKES A PLEA FOR THE MOTHER OF RAYMOND AND LOUIS.

the pages at the castle. The silence was a little embarrassing, and both boys looked at Agnes. She did not want to speak first, although she doubtless expected to say something on the subject, but she presently saw she would have to begin, and so, with a little flush on her face, she addressed the King:

"May it please you, sire," she said, "we have come to speak to you about the mother of these two boys, who is the Countess of Viteau and is in great trouble. We came to you because, as you are the King of France, you can have the wicked business stopped instantly, until some good persons can look into it; and if we went to any of the bishops or the people of the Church, they would take a long time to think about it, and the poor lady might suffer dreadfully before they would do a thing."

"I should gladly help you, my fair little lady," said the young King, with a smile; "but, on my kingly honor, I can not imagine what you would have me do. What is the wicked business, and what have bishops to do with it? Bishops are lofty personages for such young people as you to deal with."

"They are not so lofty as kings," remarked Louis, as the thought came into his mind—although, indeed, he was not impressed with the loftiness of any king present.

"You are right," said the King. "Some kings are

loftier than bishops. But come, one of you, explain your errand, that I may know how a poor king can be more expeditious than a great bishop."

As the ice was now broken, and as Raymond knew that he could tell the story better than either of the others, he began it, and laid the whole matter, very clearly and fully, before the King, who listened to the statement and to the petition for his interference with much attention and interest.

"It is a sad, sad tale," he said, when he had heard it all; "but I see not what action the King can take in a matter which belongs entirely to the Church, and is subject to the ecclesiastical laws which extend over France and all Christian countries. In such things, like my lowest subject, I am but an humble follower of our holy fathers, who know what is good for our souls."

"But it is her body, sire," exclaimed Agnes. "Think how she may suffer before they find out about her soul! We are not afraid for her soul."

The young King smiled again, although he evidently did not think it proper to smile about such subjects.

"My fair child," said he, putting his hand on Agnes's head, "you seem to take this matter as greatly to heart as if the lady was your own mother."

"My own mother is dead," said Agnes, "and I fear that I ought to be glad of that, for she, too, was

a pious lady, and knew how to read; and all these things might have been done to her had she lived to see this day."

The King's face grew serious at this, and he was silent for a few moments. But presently, turning to Raymond, he said:

"Then what you would have me do is to request these proceedings to be stopped, until some learned and pious man, with mind not prejudiced in this affair, shall examine into your mother's belief, and shall see if there be cause or need that she be tried by the Inquisition?"

"That is all, good sire," said Raymond. "That is all we ask."

"I will lay this matter before my royal mother, the Queen," said the King, "for she has far more knowledge of such subjects, and far more influence with our clergy, than I have, and I fear me not that what you desire will be readily obtained. It is a fair and reasonable request you make, and I am right well pleased you came to me to make it. So be comforted, my little friends. I will speak with the Queen this very day in your behalf."

With this he rose, and with a smile and a little wave of the hand dismissed his young petitioners. They were about to step back, when Jasto, who had been gradually getting nearer and nearer to the

central group, so that he had heard all that had been said, pulled Louis by the end of his doublet, and whispered in his ear:

"Ask if you shall come again, or if you may go home with the good news."

Then Louis advanced a little, and spoke up quickly, asking the question.

"Come to-morrow an hour earlier than this time," said the King, who evidently was much interested in the matter,—the more so, perhaps, because so little kingly business was submitted to him,—“and you shall hear exactly what will be done, and who shall be sent to catechise the Countess.” He then walked away, and the children rejoined their elder companions.

When Sir Charles heard of the suggestion made by Jasto, he slapped him on the shoulder and said to him:

"You were always a good fellow, Jasto, with ideas suitable to the occasion, both to speak and to write down with ink. Now I shall be able to see this great city of Paris, which I have not visited for ten long years."

And with minds relieved, and with the fresh and eager curiosity of young people who had never seen a city before, our three friends accompanied Sir Charles on a sight-seeing tour through Paris. The

capital of France was nothing like so large and wonderful as the Paris of to-day, but it contained, among other public edifices, that great building, the Louvre, which still stands, and which was then used, not only as a residence for the King, but as a prison. There were also beautiful bridges across the Seine, which runs through the city; the streets were paved, and there were shops; there were many people, some going one way and some another—some attending to their business, and some taking their ease, with their families, in front of their houses; gayly dressed knights were prancing through the streets on their handsome horses; ladies were gazing from windows; artisans were at work in their shops, and, altogether, the sights and delights of the Paris of 1236 produced upon these three children very much the same effect that the Paris of 1883 would have produced upon them had they lived in our day.

A little before the appointed time, the next day, Raymond, Louis, and Agnes, accompanied as at the previous interview, were in the woods of Vincennes, and advanced to the spot where they were to meet the King.

In about a quarter of an hour, the young monarch made his appearance, walking quite rapidly, and followed by several attendants. There was much less ceremony observed in those days between royal

personages and their subjects than at present, and the King walked straight up to our three friends and spoke to them.

"I am sorry," he said, "that I have not performed for you all the good offices which you asked, and which I should gladly have performed. But the Queen, who understands these important matters better than myself, assures me that it would be an action unbecoming royalty to interfere in this emergency which you have brought before me. It is a matter with which the clergy and its appointed institutions have to do, and with which the King can not meddle without detriment to Christianity, and to the proper power and influence of the Church. Whatever ought to be done, in order that the Countess of Viteau shall be justly treated in this matter, will, as I am earnestly assured, be done. And with this," he continued, after a moment's hesitation, "we ought all to be satisfied; ought we not? It was to discover the truth, and to uphold and support good Christians, that the Inquisition was established, and it is not fitting that the King or the nobility of France should doubt or fear the justice of its actions and decisions."

At these words, Agnes burst into tears; Louis, too, began to sob, and Raymond stood pale and trembling. Count Hugo and Sir Charles, perceiving that something unhappy had occurred, drew near their

young charges, while the courtiers about the King exchanged looks of compassion, as they gazed upon the sorrowful children.

"There is but one thing, then, to do," exclaimed Raymond, half turning away. "We must fly to England."

"What?" exclaimed the King; "to England! Fly? What means that?"

"In England," said Louis, his voice half-choked with tears, "the King does not allow——"

At this point Raymond gave his brother such a pull by the arm that he instantly stopped speaking, to turn around and see what was the matter, and then Raymond spoke:

"My Lord King," he said, "we must now make our way with our mother to England, because there we shall be safe from the power of the Inquisition. It may be that its trials may be just and right, but we have heard something of the horrible tortures that its prisoners have to bear, to prove whether they will tell the truth or not; and, while I live, my mother, my own dear mother, shall never be dragged from her home and be made to go through such a trial. I would kill her first myself."

"And so would I," cried Louis, "if Raymond were dead!"

"Oh, boys!" exclaimed Agnes, imploringly, "do not say such horrible things!"

The King, apparently, had not heard these latter remarks. For a moment he seemed in troubled thought, and then he said, half to himself:

"Can it be that a noble lady, and a pious one, I doubt not, must flee my dominions, to take refuge with Henry of England, because, as it appears, she is persecuted by enemies, and threatened with the rigors of the Inquisition, which, whatever they be, may perhaps well frighten the souls of a gentle dame and these poor children!"

"And they could not certainly save themselves by flight, sire," said the courtiers, "for the Pope could doubtless order them to be apprehended and remanded to these shores."

"Is there, then, no place to which we can fly?" cried little Agnes. "For I am going, too. Father and I will go."

The young King made no reply. He stood, silent and pale. Then, stepping forward a little, his head held very high, and his eyes sparkling, he said:

"Do not fly to any land. Leave not France. You are as safe here as in any spot on earth. Go back to your mother, my brave youth, and tell her that her own King will protect her from needless molestation, and will give that opportunity she asks for to show her true faith and sound belief. I will desire, as a favor to myself, that the Inquisition shall cease its

action against this lady until some wise and learned members of our clergy, whom I will send to her to inquire into this matter, shall give their fair and well-considered opinion of it. And now," said he, turning to his courtiers, his face flushed with youthful pride, "I feel more like a king of France than I ever felt before."

CHAPTER XV.

THE leader of the officers of the Inquisition was not long in discovering the retreat of the Countess. He was greatly assisted by the monks of the monastery near Viteau, who suspected, from what had been said by some of the *cotereaux* who occasionally found it necessary to go outside of the chateau court-yard, that something of importance had occurred at Viteau. By careful inquiries they soon found out that the Countess was there, and reported the fact to the chief officer at his headquarters at Barran's castle.

The Count, on the contrary, did not know where the Countess of Viteau had gone. She and Bernard had thought it best not to inform him of her place of refuge, and Barran had not endeavored to discover this place, deeming it unsafe for any one in the castle to know where she was, so long as her pursuers were

with him. He knew by the actions of his unwelcome visitors that she had not been captured, but he never imagined that she was in her own chateau of Viteau.

Early on the morning of the second day after that on which Count Hugo and his party started on their return from Paris, bearing the happy news that the King had consented to interfere in behalf of the Countess, and that one or two well-qualified persons were, as soon as possible, to visit her at the castle of Barran to give her an opportunity of properly representing her case, the Inquisitors appeared at Viteau.

Viteau, although not exactly a castle, was, like all the residences of the upper classes in those days, a strongly defended place. It had a wall around the court-yard, and its numerous towers and turrets and little balconies were constructed to accommodate and protect a large number of archers and cross-bow men.

Therefore it was that Robert de Comines, the leader of the Inquisitorial party, thought it well to have a strong body of men with him in case it became necessary to force his way into the chateau.

First posting soldiers at every entrance to the grounds, Comines marched to the great gate and demanded admittance. Michol, who had received notice that a large body of men was approaching, and who felt quite sure that he knew who they were,

gave some orders to his under-officers and hastened to the gate.

"Who may you be?" said Michol from the window in the gate, "and why come you here? These gates open, now, to no visitors, friends or foes."

Comines did not see fit to state the object of his visit, nor to exhibit his authority, and without answering Michol's questions, he asked another.

"Are you the captain of the robbers who have seized upon this chateau?" he said.

"I am the captain of the good and valiant *cotereaux*, who hold this chateau and its belongings as a warranty for a just and righteous debt," answered Michol. "Have you aught to say to me concerning the matter?"

"I have something to say to you," replied Comines, "which you will do well to hear, and that speedily. Open the gate and let me enter."

"If you wish to speak with me," answered Michol, "I am ready to hear what you have to say. But you need not enter, fair sir. I will come out to you."

"No, no!" cried the other. "I must go in. Open the gate!"

"That will I, gladly," said Michol, "but it must be for me to go out and not for you to come in. This is not my dwelling, nor are these my lands. I meet my friends and foes in the forest and on the road."

At these words the gates were thrown open, and

Michol rushed out, followed by nearly all his men, who had been closely massed behind him while he spoke. The *cotereaux* were in such a large and solid body that they completely filled the gateway and forced back Comines and his men, who vainly endeavored to maintain their ground before the gate.

Comines shouted and threatened, and his followers manfully struggled with the robbers, who surged like a great wave from the gate; but it was of no use. Out came the *cotereaux*, and backward were forced Comines's men, until all the robbers, excepting those who were left to guard the other gates, and some archers who were posted on certain of the towers, had rushed into the road, and the gates had been locked behind them.

The sudden confusion had been so great that, at first, the two leaders could not find each other. At length they met in the middle of the road, and the men of each party disengaged themselves from one another as rapidly as possible, and gathered in two confronting bodies, each behind its leader.

"Here am I. What would you have?" said Michol.

"Thief and leader of thieves!" cried the enraged Comines. "Do you suppose that I want you! You shall feel the power of the Church in your own person for this violence. Know that I am an officer of the

Holy Inquisition, with all due authority and warrant to carry out my purpose, and that I come to apprehend and take before our high tribunal the person of the Countess of Viteau, who is behind those walls. Now that you know my errand, stand back and let me enter."

"That will I not," said Michol, firmly. "Whatever your errand and your authority, you come too late. The Countess of Viteau is now my prisoner. I hold her and this chateau as security for the payment of ransom-money justly due me; and I will give her up to no man until that ransom shall be paid. Whatever warrant you may have, I know well that you have none to take from me my prisoner."

"Rascal!" cried Comines, "who would show a warrant to a thief? Will you open that gate to me?"

"No," said Michol, "I will not."

"Then take that for my authority!" said Comines, drawing his sword as he spoke, and making a sudden thrust at the robber leader.

Michol had no sword, but in his right hand he bore a mace or club with a heavy steel or iron head. This was a weapon generally used by knights on horseback, but Michol was a tall, strong fellow, and he carried it with ease. Stepping quickly aside as Comines thrust at him, he swung his mace in the air, and brought it down upon his adversary's head with such

rapidity and force that it knocked him senseless to the ground.

This blow was followed, almost instantly, by a general conflict. As none of Comines's men were mounted, their horses having been left at the monastery, and as they did not number half as many as the *cotereaux*,—who were, indeed, in much stronger force than Comines and the monks had imagined,—the fight was not a long one. The robbers soon overpowered their opponents, killing some, causing others to make a disorderly flight, and taking a number of prisoners.

The latter were carefully robbed,—not an article of value, not a weapon, nor piece of armor being left on their persons,—and then they were set free to carry away their wounded and dead comrades.

Michol sent a detachment of his men to attack the soldiers who had been placed outside of the other entrances to the chateau; and when these had been routed and the battle-field in front of the great gate had been cleared of enemies, dead and alive, the robber captain entered the court-yard with his men, and the gates were locked and barred behind him.

Bernard, the squire, had been watching the combat from a high tower.

"I knew," he said to himself, when it was over, "that this was the only place in France where the

Countess would be safe. For none but a pack of thieves would have dared to fight those who came to capture her."

The Countess was greatly agitated when she heard of the affair, for she knew nothing of it until it was over. She was glad and thankful that her pursuers had been defeated in their object, but she thought it was a terrible thing to have had an actual conflict with them.

Her good squire did his best to make matters look as well as possible.

"You must remember, my lady," said he, "that the fight was not within our walls, and that none of us took part in it. And, I trow, we shall not soon see again those men from Toulouse; for the leader of them has been grievously disabled, and it will be many a day before he will again desire to carry off anybody."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE Countess of Viteau now became very anxious to learn, as soon as possible, the result of her embassy to the King, and she also wished her sons to know where she was. She consulted with her squire, Bernard, in regard to the matter; and they concluded that it would be better, if the travelers brought bad news, and the young King had refused to interfere in behalf of the Countess, that Raymond and Louis should know the place of her refuge before any of their party could reach Barran's castle, and that they should immediately join her, when, with them, she should fly the country without delay or further consultation with any one.

She had determined at last that, if she should be obliged to leave her country, she would take her boys with her, and let the Count de Barran and her

other friends do the best they could in regard to her estates. She had money enough in her possession to provide for the expenses of a journey to England, but she did not consider, when making her plans, that the captain of the *cotereaux* would require his claims paid before he would let her go. Bernard thought of this, but he said nothing and hoped for the best.

Michol also was quite anxious to know what had been done at Paris, for the news would influence in a great degree the terms of his demands for ransom money.

On the day after the attack of Comines had been repulsed, it was considered that Count de Lannes and his party might be expected to be nearing the end of their homeward journey, and it was determined to send a page, accompanied by one of Michol's men, to intercept the travelers and to convey a note to Raymond from his mother.

The main road from Paris through Burgundy ran within twelve or fifteen miles of Viteau, and Count Hugo might therefore be met, while yet more than half a day's journey from the castle.

The page's companion knew all the roads and by-ways of the surrounding country, and they reached in good time the high road from Paris, but after waiting there all day and making inquiries at various

cottages near by, they saw nothing and heard no news of the Count and his company.

After dark they returned to Viteau, as they had been told to do, for it was known that Count Hugo would not travel by night, and before daylight the next morning they set out again.

The long watch of the previous day had wearied the restless soul of the robber, and he declared to the page, as they rode along, that they would have another day to wait upon the dusty highway, for he had been to Paris and he knew how long it would take the Count's party to go and return, and that they could not be reasonably expected that day.

"See you that cottage down there in the little glade below us?" he said to the page, a little after sunrise. "There live an old woman and two louts, her sons. They are poor creatures, but they make wine good enough to sell; at least, a month or so ago, when I and a half-dozen of my comrades stopped at their cottage to eat and rest, that is what they told me they did with it. We found their wine good to drink,—which can not be said of all wine that is good enough to sell,—and we drank many a full horn of it, and what we did not drink we poured over her floor, so that her house should smell of good cheer."

"That was a wasteful thing to do," said the page, "and must have cost you a goodly sum,"

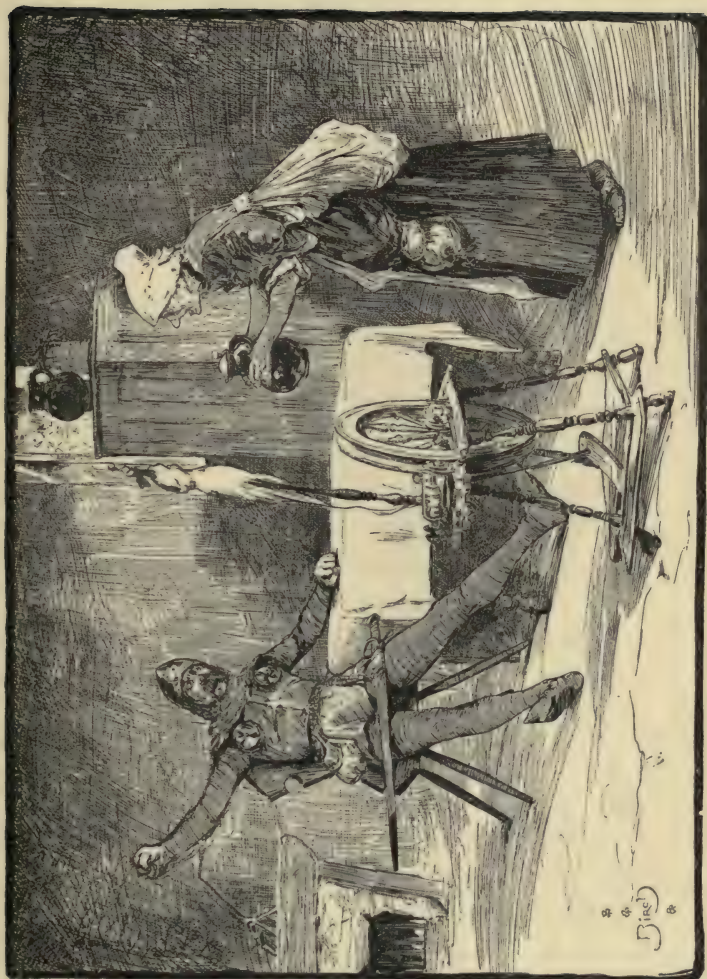
"Cost us!" laughed the robber. "How could it cost us anything when we had no money? And now, look you, we have more time than we shall know what to do with, and I am going down there for some wine to cheer us through the day. Ride you slowly on, and I will overtake you before you have gone half a mile."

So saying, the robber turned from the road, and dashed down into the glade. Reaching the cottage, he tied his horse by the door, and, entering, demanded of the old woman, who was cooking something over a little fire, that she should bring him some of her good wine, and plenty of it, too, for he wanted some to drink and some to carry away.

The old woman looked at him for a moment, and then went out and brought a jug of wine and a drinking-horn.

When the robber had sat down on a rough stool, and had begun to drink, she went out for some wood for her fire. But instead of picking up dry sticks, she ran to a small field where her sons were working.

"Come quickly!" she said. "One of the cowardly thieves who drank and wasted our wine, a while ago, and struck me in the face when I asked for pay, is in the cottage now, drinking and robbing us again. There were many of them then, and you could do nothing. Now there is only one. Come quickly!"



THE ROBBER IN THE OLD WOMAN'S COTTAGE.

Without a word, the young men, still carrying the heavy hoes they had been using, ran to the house, and rushing into the room where the robber was still seated on his stool, engaged in drinking his second horn of wine, they attacked him with their hoes.

The *coterel* sprang from his seat, and drew the heavy sword which hung at his belt, but, in an instant, it was knocked from his hand, and he was belabored over the head and shoulders by the hoes of the angry young peasants. If he had not worn an iron cap, which was his only piece of armor, he probably would have been killed. As it was, he was glad to plunge out of the door and run for the woods. The two young men pursued him, but he was a faster runner than they, and his legs were not injured. So, wounded and bruised, and very sorry that he had thought about the old woman's wine, he left them behind, and disappeared among the thick undergrowth of the neighboring forest. His pursuers returned to the cottage and set loose the robber's horse.

"The wicked thief shall not creep back," they said, "to do us further injury, and then jump on his horse and fly."

And they threw stones at the horse until he had galloped up to the road and out of sight.

The page, who had been urged by his mistress to lose no time in reaching the high road, for fear that

her sons might pass before he got there, rode on and on, looking back continually for his companion, but never stopping. Reaching a place where they had made a short cut, the day before, he tried to find it, got into the woods and lost his way. A wood-cutter set him straight, but when he reached the Paris road, it was long past noon, and he was dreadfully afraid that Count de Lannes's party had gone by.

Inquiries of some peasants, who lived not far from the road, made him almost sure that his fears were correct, for they had noticed two companies of horsemen go by, and they thought that there were some young people with one of them. Still, he waited and watched, and wondered why the *coterel* did not come, until nightfall, and then he set out to return to Viteau. Without his robber companion,—whom, by the way, he never saw again, for the fellow was afraid to return to his captain, having lost his horse,—it was quite impossible for him to find his way back in the dark, and in less than an hour he was hopelessly lost. Finding no wood-cutter, or any one else, who could show him his way, he wandered about until he and his horse were tired out, and then they spent the rest of the night under a tree.

The page was quite right when he supposed that Count Hugo's party had passed along the high road before he reached it. The travelers had pressed on

vigorously during their homeward journey, and meeting with no hindrances,—of *brabançois*, or anything else,—they rode into the gates of Barran's castle before nightfall of the day on which the page had missed them.

As soon as they had entered the court-yard, the two boys sprang from their horses and ran to the great door of the castle. But here they were met by the Count de Barran, who, with outstretched arms, stopped them as they were hurrying to their mother's apartments, and, as gently as he could, told them,—with Agnes and her father, who had now come up,—the story of the visit of the Inquisitors and the flight of the Countess.

The poor boys were almost overcome by this entirely unlooked-for and dreadful news. They had hurried back, excited and happy with the good tidings they were bringing their mother, only to find that she had utterly disappeared, and no one could tell them whether she was safe, or had fallen into the hands of her persecutors. Louis burst into tears, and fell on the neck of his brother, who folded him in his arms, and, without a word, the two boys stumbled up the stairs, and were seen no more that night.

Early the next morning, Raymond and Louis, still with pale and tear-stained faces, but unable to remain quiet any longer, came down to the stables,

and, ordering two horses to be saddled, mounted them, and rode away to look for their mother.

If any of their elders had known of their intention, they would not have been allowed to go. This they well knew, and so they hurried away before any one but the servants of the castle was awake. They felt that they hated the Count de Barran for having let their mother go away, without knowing where she could be found or heard from, and they wished to have nothing more to do with him. And they had come to the belief that no one but themselves could do anything for their mother now, and that they must ride the whole world over until they had found her.

Each was armed with sword and dagger, and they had some money with them to buy food. As to plans, they had made only one, and that was to ride so far that day that Barran would not be likely to find them and bring them back ; and then they would make inquiries, and come to some decision as to which direction they should go in their mournful search.

The sun was about two hours' high, and they had ridden quite a long distance, when they saw coming toward them on the road a boy upon a horse. In a moment they recognized their mother's page, and he as soon knew them. The three young fellows rushed together, and began clamorously to ask questions. The page being only one against two was soon obliged to

surrender in this question conflict, and to give answers to his eager young masters.

When Raymond and Louis heard that their mother was at Viteau, they asked nothing more, but giving a shout of joy, turned their horses' heads toward their old home, for they were on a road leading directly thereto, which the page had at last found.

Onward and onward the three galloped, much to the weariness of their poor horses, and some hours before nightfall they reached Viteau, where they were readily admitted by Michol, who gave Raymond and Louis even a more eager welcome than that with which he had opened the gates to their mother.

CHAPTER XVII.

NOW that he had not only the Countess of Viteau, but her two sons, under his control and in his power, Michol became very anxious to settle the matter of the ransom money which he intended to demand for his prisoners, as he considered them.

He set one of his new men, who happened to be a truer scribe than Jasto, at work to write a carefully-worded paper, to be sent to Count de Barran, and in it he stated the terms on which he would release the Countess and her sons and retire, with his men, from Viteau.

The Countess, now happy in the possession of her sons, and having the good news from the King, was very desirous to start immediately for the castle of the Count de Barran, where she expected the priests from Paris would soon arrive. She was greatly surprised and dis-

appointed when she found that Michol would not let her go until the ransoms had been paid ; and the two boys were very angry, and wanted to go down and demand that Michol should instantly order the gates to be opened to them. But their mother restrained them. They were now in the power of these robbers, and they must be prudent.

Michol, having understood that the Countess was not herself prepared to pay any money, had prudently determined to transact his business with Barran alone. He was very glad, however, to have her write a letter requesting the Count to pay the ransoms demanded, promising to return the money when she again took charge of her estates and business affairs, and urging him to use all possible haste in settling the matter with the captain of the *cotereaux*.

This letter, with the one from Michol, was sent to the Count the day after the arrival of Raymond and Louis at Viteau, and it gave the people at the castle the first news of the whereabouts of the Countess, and also relieved them from the new anxiety caused by the departure of the boys, for whom search was at that time being made.

But while these news gladdened the hearts and relieved the minds of the Count de Barran and his friends, the terms of Michol's letter vexed them exceedingly, and threatened to embarrass them very much.

The wily robber knew that there were urgent reasons why the Countess should, as soon as possible, be at liberty to attend to private affairs, and therefore he greatly increased the demands he had before determined to make.

Not only did he require the payment of the amount originally fixed as the ransom for Louis, but he asked a very large sum for the release of the Countess; quite as much for Raymond's ransom; a smaller sum for Bernard; and a good price for his so-called services in taking care of the chateau, and protecting its inmates.

Beside all this, he demanded that Jasto, the man who had deserted him, should be delivered to him for punishment.

Although Count de Barran was a rich nobleman, the total amount named in this letter was far more money than he had in his possession at the time; and far more, too, than the Countess could afford to repay him, if he had had it to send to Michol. Still, although he was very much annoyed and provoked by the impudent demands of the robber captain, he said that there was nothing to be done but to accede to them; for the Countess must be released, and that instantly. Not only was it positively necessary for her to be at the castle when the priests from Paris arrived (for it was not at all likely that they would be willing to go to Viteau and trust themselves among a gang of thieves), but he

was afraid that, if the terms of Michol were resisted, or even disputed, he might be provoked to do some injury to the Countess or her sons in order to hasten the payment of the ransoms. Such conduct was not uncommon among these thieves. For these reasons, he would endeavor to raise the money and pay it, as soon as possible.

Sir Charles was very indignant at that portion of the letter relating to Jasto. He had been very glad to regain his old servant, who had left him on account of a quarrel with a squire, and who, according to his own account, had been obliged to join the *cotereaux* because he could find nothing else to do; and he stoutly declared that he would not reward Jasto's good action in bringing Louis to his mother by delivering him to the vengeance of the scoundrel, Michol.

As this determination would make it useless to send the money to Viteau, if Michol insisted on the surrender of Jasto, Barran sent a message, in great haste, to the captain of the *cotereaux*, to inquire if he would be willing to take a ransom for Jasto, and also to ask if he would release the Countess and her company on the payment of half of the total sum demanded, and be content to remain at Viteau until the rest should be paid.

To this Michol sent a very short answer, in which he declared that he would accept no terms for the

release of his prisoners but the delivery of Jasto and the payment of the entire sum named in his letter.

The messengers who brought this answer also brought the news of the fight with the Inquisition people.

Such startling intelligence as this produced a great effect upon the mind of Barran, as it showed him to what length the robber captain was willing to go, in order to secure the possession of his prisoners and the payment of their ransoms; and he set out that very day, accompanied by his chief seneschal and other attendants, to visit some of his estates, and also some small towns at no great distance, and there endeavor to collect the money needed. The Jasto question, he thought, must be settled as best it could be. His safety must not interfere with that of the Countess.

As for Count Hugo, he would have nothing to do with this business. He utterly disapproved of paying the exorbitant sums demanded by Michol, or indeed any money at all, for the release of a noble lady and her sons, whom the rascals had no right whatever to hold or to ask ransom for. If this money should be paid, he said, it would show all the thieves and outlaws of the country that the nobles of France were willing to pay them enormous sums for any ladies and high-born children that they might steal. Heretofore, they expected vengeance if they attempted anything of the

kind, but now they would expect such deeds to make them rich. To be sure, this case was a peculiar one; but never, he declared, as a knight of Christendom, would he submit to the vile exactions of a common robber like Michol.

And little Agnes cried, and wandered about moaning, and wished she was a man. What she would have done if she had been a man she did not know, but certainly she could do nothing as a little girl, or even as a grown-up woman.

Jasto, when he was told what his old master had said in regard to him, retired into a remote part of the castle where he could not be easily found, and diligently occupied his time with some writing materials which he had brought from Paris.

"I must e'en make haste and learn to be a true scribe," he said to himself, "for if my master finds me out, he may be only too willing to toss me into the jaws of the *cotereaux*. So, hard will I work at this alphabet and this little book of words, and keep a sharp eye and ear open for any change in Sir Charles's mind about his good man Jasto. It will be a doughty man-at-arms and a vigilant who delivers me to Michol."

Not long after the Count de Barran had started on his money-raising errand, Count Hugo set out on a little journey to the monastery, a few miles from Viteau, where the wounded Comines and other disa-

bled members of the Inquisitorial force were said to be still lying. He wished to find out whether orders had been received to cease attempts to arrest the Countess, and also to discover the exact truth, as far as possible, about the fight with the *cotereaux* and the strength of Michol's forces.

As he was going into what might prove a dangerous neighborhood, he took with him a body of about thirty-five horsemen, all completely clad in armor, of which there were many suits in the castle, and all well armed. Some of these men were his own retainers, and others belonged to the retinue of Sir Charles, who did not accompany his friend, as Count Hugo thought it well that some knight should remain at the castle, from which nearly all the visitors had now departed.

When Count Hugo de Lannes reached the monastery, he found that Comines was too much injured to speak or think about the affair in which he had been engaged, but he learned from the monks that no recent message had arrived for Comines, and he also heard how the *cotereaux* had robbed him of his clothes and armor, and had even taken, it was supposed, all his papers of authority from the Inquisition.

From this information, Count Hugo felt sure that the Countess need be under no fear of trouble from the Inquisitors before the message to desist from further

action should reach them. Comines, although he had excellent surgical and medical attention from the monks, would not recover for some time; and none of the other members of his party would be likely to attempt to carry off a noble lady through a great part of France, without being able to show any warrant for their proceedings.

It had been late in the day when Count Hugo arrived at the monastery, and it was quite dark when, after his party had been furnished with a good supper by the monks, he took leave of his entertainers.

He did not take the straight road back to the castle, but struck off toward Viteau. His men traveled slowly by the light of the stars. Some time before they reached the chateau, a halt was ordered by a small wood; and there Count Hugo had a ladder made.

Two straight young saplings, which were easily selected by the men, whose eyes were now accustomed to the dim light, were hewn down for the uprights of the ladder, and slight notches were cut into them at suitable distances for the rounds. These were made of short, strong pieces of other saplings, quickly cut into proper lengths, and were fastened to the uprights by strong leathern thongs, of which one of the men had brought a number tied to his saddle.

When this rude ladder was finished, one horseman

took it by one end, another took it by the other, and the cavalcade proceeded.

Reaching Viteau,—which they did not approach by the front, but on the southern side,—the horses were tied at some distance from the court-yard, and left in charge of several of the soldiers, while the other men, carrying the ladder, quietly made their way to the side-wall of the court. There had been a moat on the outside of this wall, but after the wars were over, and the Count de Viteau had died, this moat had been allowed to go dry, and so Count Hugo and his men were able to walk up to the wall and set their ladder against it. The Count, with three or four followers, then got over the wall, and when they were in the court-yard they cautiously moved toward the great gate. They encountered no one, for, although the *cotereaux* preserved moderately good discipline, they did not keep a very strict guard at night, expecting no attack from any quarter.

Arriving at the gate, the Count found there one sentry fast asleep. This fellow was quickly seized and bound, with a scarf over his mouth; and the gate being opened, the remainder of the Count's force, which had been ordered around to the front, was noiselessly admitted.

The whole body then proceeded to the chateau, where a dim light could be seen shining through a

wide crack at the door of the principal entrance. This crack, which was between the edge of the door and its casement, showed that one bolt was the only fastening which the robbers had thought it necessary to use in securing this entrance; and when the Count had made himself certain of this fact, he signaled to a tall man who carried a great battle-ax, apparently brought for use in a case like this, and motioned to him to use his weapon on the fastening of the door.

Two tremendous blows, which resounded through the house, shattered the bolt, and the door was immediately dashed open.

Count Hugo, who had carefully made all his plans, rushed in, with four men at his heels, and hurried up the stair-way which led to the apartments of the Countess and her sons. There were hanging-lamps in the halls, and he knew the house quite well.

At the top of the stairs he encountered Bernard, who slept outside of the door of his mistress's apartments, and who, aroused by the noise and seeing five armed men coming up the stairs, had sprung to his feet and seized his sword, prepared to do his best for the defense of the Countess and her boys. But when Count Hugo raised his visor and spoke to him, the brave but frightened squire immediately recognized him as a friend.

"Stay here!" cried the Count, "with these four men. Guard the stair-way. Let no one go up or down!" And, with these words, he dashed alone down into the great hall-way, where the sounds of fighting and of calls to arms were heard, and threw himself into the combat that was going on between his men and a dozen or so of the robbers who had rushed to the door-way when they heard the noise of the ax.

But there was not much fighting inside the chateau. Most of the *cotereaux* lodged in the lower part of the house approached from the outside by various doors, or in the outhouses and stables, and the court-yard was now filled with these, hastily armed to repel the intruders.

The robbers in the hallway were soon forced into this court-yard, and into the midst of the *cotereaux* Count Hugo, with the whole body of his followers, now boldly plunged. Such attacks as these, made by one or two knights with a few attendants against a much greater force, were very popular in those days of chivalry. For, whether the rash onslaught were successful or not, the glory was the same. And if the safety or honor of a lady happened to be concerned, the unequal combat was the more attractive to the knights. For a lady in those days was often the cause of a knight's fiercest battles and the sub-

ject of nearly all his songs. These combats, however, were not always quite so unequal as they seemed, for a knight clad from head to foot in armor was more than equal to three or four soldiers not so well guarded by steel plates and rings.

The Count's men, as has been said before, each wore a complete suit of armor, while the *cotereaux*, although much better protected in this way than most men of their class, were none of them completely dressed in mail. This, with the darkness of the night and the suddenness of the combat, gave the attacking party great advantage.

As they had been instructed, the Count's men scattered themselves among their opponents, shouting the battle-cry of De Lannes, and striking furiously right and left. This gave the *cotereaux* the idea that their enemies were in much greater number than they really were,—and half a dozen of these mailed warriors sometimes banding together and rushing through the throng gave the idea of re-enforcements,—while the horses outside, hearing the noises of clattering steel and the cries of the combatants, neighed and snorted, and their attendants shouted, making the robbers suppose there were other forces beyond the walls.

The Countess and her sons were, of course, quickly aroused by the din and turmoil below, and Raymond

and Louis rushed to the door, where they were met by Bernard, who told them all he knew, and that was that Count Hugo de Lannes had come to the chateau with a lot of soldiers and was fighting the *cotereaux*.

The Countess knew not what to think of this most unexpected occurrence, and hastily dressed herself to be ready for whatever might happen, while the two boys, throwing on their clothes and seizing their swords, endeavored to rush down-stairs and join in the conflict. But this Bernard and the men on the stair-way prevented, and the boys were obliged to be contented with listening to the sounds of battle and with seeing what little they could discern from the upper windows.

Meanwhile, the struggle raged fiercely below, the crowd of combatants surging from one side to the other of the court. It was not long, however, before the *cotereaux* began to be demoralized by the fierce and wild attacks of their mailed antagonists. Michol had been killed, and there was no one to command and rally them. Some of them, being hard pressed and finding the great gate open, rushed wildly through and were lost in the outer darkness; and before long the main body of the *cotereaux*, finding that many of their companions were retreating through the gate, were seized with a panic and a desire to fly while they had the opportunity.



THE ROBBERS IN THE HALLWAY WERE SOON FORCED INTO THE COURTYARD.

A great rush was therefore soon made for the gate, out of which the *cotereaux* pushed and crowded—even carrying with them in their rush some of the Count's men who were fighting in their midst.

This flight was precisely what Count Hugo had wished to bring about. It would have been impossible for him to conquer and subdue so many men with his small number of followers. But he had purposely left the great gate open, and hoped by this sudden and determined onslaught in the dark to throw the *cotereaux* into disorder, and thus be able to drive them from the chateau.

Accordingly, he massed his men as quickly as he could, and, making a circuit of the court, drove before him every straggling *coterel*, and then, following the retreating robbers through the gates, pursued their straggling forces through bushes and fields as far as they could be seen. Then calling his men together, and ordering the horses to be brought into the court-yard, Count Hugo hastened back to the chateau, and the great gate was shut and bolted behind them. With torch and lantern every part of the chateau was now searched, and none of the *cotereaux*, excepting the killed and wounded, having been found therein, the Count pronounced his victory complete, and proceeded up the stairs to the apartments of the Countess.

Day had now dawned, and the victorious Count Hugo was received by the boys and their mother with the greatest thankfulness and delight. Bernard had already told them of the rout of the *cotereaux*, but they could not understand why the attack had been made, when they had expected a peaceful settlement of the affair by the payment of the ransoms.

But when the Count explained the matter to them, and told the Countess what an enormous sum the robber-captain had demanded for their release, and told Louis that the surrender and probable execution of Jasto was included in the terms, they did not wonder when he went on to say that his mind could not endure the idea of submitting to such outrageous and unjustifiable demands from a common thief of the roads, and that he had therefore resolved to strike a bold stroke to give them their liberty without payment or cowardly submission. It is true that if this attack had failed the safety of the Countess and her boys would have been endangered; but as it did not fail, nothing was said upon this point.

But the Count gave them little time for thanks or wonderment. As soon as the necessary preparations could be made and the signs of conflict removed from the court-yard, he sent the Countess

and her party rejoicing on their way to the castle of Barran. Although the *cotereaux* had not actually pillaged the chateau, it was impossible for such rude and disorderly men to live there for any length of time without causing a good deal of injury to the house and surroundings, making Viteau an unfit place for a lady to reside in.

Accordingly, with a few of the Count's men-at-arms as an escort,—for no danger was now apprehended on the road,—the Countess went to the castle, not, as before, flying wildly from her pursuers, but journeying pleasantly along in company with her sons and attendants. Bernard, who now no longer feared to leave his mistress, remained behind to attend to the renovation and repairs of the chateau, and to make it fit for the return of its mistress. None of Count Hugo's men had been killed and but few injured in the fight, for they had protected themselves in the darkness from attack from each other by continually shouting the battle-cry of De Lannes, and the *cotereaux* had not been able to make much impression upon their heavy armor.

The Count now determined, with the main body of his soldiers, to follow up the attack upon the *cotereaux*—to penetrate, if possible, to their camp, and to destroy it entirely, and to drive the rem-

nant of this band of thieves from the forests about Viteau.

Therefore he also remained at the chateau, which he intended making his basis of operations in the projected campaign of extermination against the remaining *cotereaux*.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BARRAN was much delayed in his endeavors to obtain the money necessary for the ransoms, and he found a great deal of difficulty in collecting it at all at such short notice. And wearied with his unpleasant and annoying task, and with his mind full of doubts and anxieties regarding the obstacles and complications that might yet arise from the probable refusal of Sir Charles to surrender Jasto, he rode into his castle the day after the arrival of the Countess.

His astonishment and delight upon finding the Countess and her family safe within his walls, and on hearing that Viteau was free from every robber and in the possession of its rightful owner, and that for all this no ransom or price of any kind was to be paid, can well be imagined. And when

he and the Countess talked the matter over, it became evident to the lady that to repay the Count the sums he intended to advance—which payment she most certainly would have made—would have impoverished her for years.

All was now happiness and satisfaction at the castle, but no one was happier or better satisfied than the ex-robber, Jasto. Now that his enemy, Michol, was dead, he felt that his own life was safe; for it would be no longer necessary to sacrifice him for the good of others. He sat down in a corner of the court-yard, and thought the matter over.

“As to that ransom,” he said to himself, “which was due me for returning the boy Louis to his sorrowing mother, I must make some proper settlement about it. Half of it I remitted when the boy saved me from the hands of the bloody-minded *brabancois*, and one-half of what was left I took off when these good people gave back to me again my brave and noble master, Sir Charles. And now that that great knight, Sir Hugo de Lannes, has killed Michol and saved my life, I do remit what is left, which is only a quarter of the whole sum—after all, hardly equal to the benefit received; for when a man’s life is in danger as much from his friends as his enemies, it is a very great benefit, indeed, to have it saved. But, as I have no money

with which to make up the balance, I will e'en call the account settled, and so it is."

As Jasto took so much credit to himself for this generous determination, it was not to be expected he should keep the matter secret, and he therefore communicated it to Louis the first time he saw the boy, giving him in careful detail his reasons for what he had intended to do, and what he had done.

All this Louis very soon told to his mother; and the Countess, remembering that she had promised Jasto a reward, and feeling a little ashamed that it had passed out of her mind, took the hint which Jasto had undoubtedly intended to throw out, and sent him a sum of money which, if used with ordinary economy, would make it unnecessary for him ever again to wear a suit of clothes resembling a map of a country with the counties and departments marked out with border-lines of red silk.

A week afterward, when Jasto left the castle with Sir Charles, his education had progressed sufficiently to enable him, with the assistance of his alphabet and his little manuscript book, to write a short and simple message so that it could be read. But he intended to persevere in his studies until he had become as good a scribe as his master formerly supposed him to be.

By the aid of some deserters from the band of *cotereaux*, who came over to him when they found

out his object, Count Hugo soon discovered the encampment of the robbers, which he utterly destroyed, and then, following them to their several retreats, succeeded in breaking up their organization and in driving them from that part of the country.

He then returned to the castle of Barran, where he was most warmly welcomed by everybody, and where his little daughter Agnes was prouder of her brave father than she had ever been before.

In a few weeks, the Count de Lannes found himself obliged to return to his own castle, which lay several days' journey to the west; and he and Agnes took a regretful leave of all their dear friends, the little girl shedding tears of heartfelt sorrow as she shook her handkerchief for the last time to the boys and their mother, who stood watching her departure from the battlements.

"I wonder," said Louis, "if we shall ever see them again."

Nothing was said for a moment, and then his mother remarked: "I think—that is, I have reason to believe—that we shall soon see the Count and his daughter again."

"Why do you think so, mother?" asked Raymond.

The Countess did not answer him immediately, and just then they were joined by the Count de Barran, and no more was said on the subject.

The Countess did not remain much longer at the castle. As soon as the squire Bernard had restored her chateau to its former orderly condition, she bade good-bye to her kind entertainer and friend, and departed with her boys for her own home.

Nothing had been heard of the priests who were to be sent from Paris, but there might be many good reasons for their delay; and arrangements were made for a courier to be sent to Viteau as soon as they should arrive at the castle. The Countess would have been happy to have had her suspense in regard to this unfortunate affair set permanently at rest, but she knew the Inquisitorial party had gone back to Toulouse as soon as their leader was able to accomplish the journey; and having been assured of the protection of her King, she felt safe from unjust prosecution.

On the morning after their arrival at Viteau, Louis, who was gladly wandering all about the house and grounds, went into a little room on the lower floor which was opposite the sleeping apartment of the squire Bernard. Here, by the light of a small window near the ceiling, he saw, upon a perch in one corner of the room, a falcon, secured by a string which was tied to its leg. Louis threw the door wide open in order to get a better light, and narrowly examined the bird.

"Why, Bernard!" he cried to the squire, who just then entered the room, "this looks exactly like the falcon I took from this very perch the morning of the day I first went to De Barran's castle."

"Of course it looks like it," said the squire, "for it is the same falcon."

"The same falcon!" exclaimed Louis. "And on the same perch! Why, that is a miracle!"

"It is no miracle at all," answered Bernard; "it is a very simple thing when you come to know all about it. After the rascally *cotereaux* had been driven out of this place, I found the falcon fastened to this perch, and, by marks I had filed upon his beak, I knew him for the same bird I had trained for your brother Raymond. Of course, I was astonished; but, on thinking the matter over, I supposed that this must be the bird which the robbers had stolen from you, and that, bringing it with them when they came here to live,—the rascally scoundrels!—they naturally put it in this room, which they could see had been planned and fitted for the keeping of falcons. Looking into the matter still further, I asked Orlon, the chief falconer of Count Hugo, who was one of the men he had brought here with him, what kind of bird it was he had given to you when the Count desired that you should have one. Orlon then told me it was a falcon which had come to him only the day before. He had

been out hawking with his master, and was bringing down to him by means of a lure a falcon that had made an unsuccessful flight, when a strange hawk made its appearance and also answered his call, and came down to the lure. Knowing it to be a falcon which had been lost by some hunter, and to be a well-trained bird, he seized and hooded it and took it home with him. The next day, when he was ordered to give a bird to a boy, he much preferred to part with this one, which he had just found, to giving away any of the falcons he had reared and trained himself. And this is the whole of the matter."

"You may think it a very simple story," said Louis, "but I think it is wonderful. I am ever so glad to have the falcon back again; and just think, Bernard, if it had not been for my losing that bird, ever so many troubles would not have happened, and those wicked thieves would never have come to this chateau!"

The squire agreed that this was true, but he thought more than he said. He thought that if Louis's kind heart had not been anxious to repair the injury done his brother, he would not have been captured by the *cotereaux*; and that, if he had not been captured by the *cotereaux*, no ransom would have been demanded for him; and if no ransom had been demanded, the robbers never would have seized

upon Viteau to enforce their claims; and if they had not been at Viteau, there would have been no place of refuge for the Countess when flying from the Inquisitors; and that, instead of the happiness which was now so general at the chateau, all might have been misery. But he said nothing of this to Louis, for he thought it not right that boys should take to themselves too much credit for what they might do.

But although contentment seemed to reign at Viteau, this was not really the case. True, the chateau had been completely renovated, and all traces of its occupation by the *cotereaux* had been removed; but the Countess could not forget that it had been the abode of thieves, and that bloody and violent deeds had so lately taken place before its gates and within its very court-yard. Then, too, she felt that she must soon be separated from her boys. Raymond must go to school at Paris, and Louis must return to his duties as the page of the Count de Barran. And this separation seemed a very different thing to her now from what it did before these troubles came upon her.

Louis was particularly discontented. "I do not want to go back to Barran," he said to his brother. "I do not believe he is a true knight."

"What!" cried Raymond, in surprise. "You

should not speak thus, Louis. No man has ever said such a thing of the Count de Barran."

"I suppose not," said Louis, "but I am a boy, and I can say it. He stood still and did nothing when our mother had to fly for her life from his castle; and he wanted to buy us away from the thieves, instead of coming and taking us boldly, as a true knight should. Count Hugo is a different kind of a knight."

"But you should not forget," said Raymond, "how kind and generous the Count de Barran has always been to us. He worked in his own way for our mother's good."

"Oh, yes," said Louis, "I shall not forget that; but I do not want to go back to him."

Matters were in this condition when, one beautiful day in autumn, Count Hugo came again to Viteau. This time he did not clamber over the wall, but rode in bravely at the front gate. He was not followed by a body of steel-clad soldiers, but he brought his daughter Agnes, with her attendants, and a company of followers in gay and bright array. He did not come to conquer, but he came because he had been conquered. He came to ask the lovely Countess of Viteau to be his wife.

A few weeks after this, when the days were becoming clear and frosty, there was a wedding at Viteau.

There were many guests; there was feasting, and music, and great joy. Little Agnes had now a mother, and Raymond and Louis a brave and noble father.

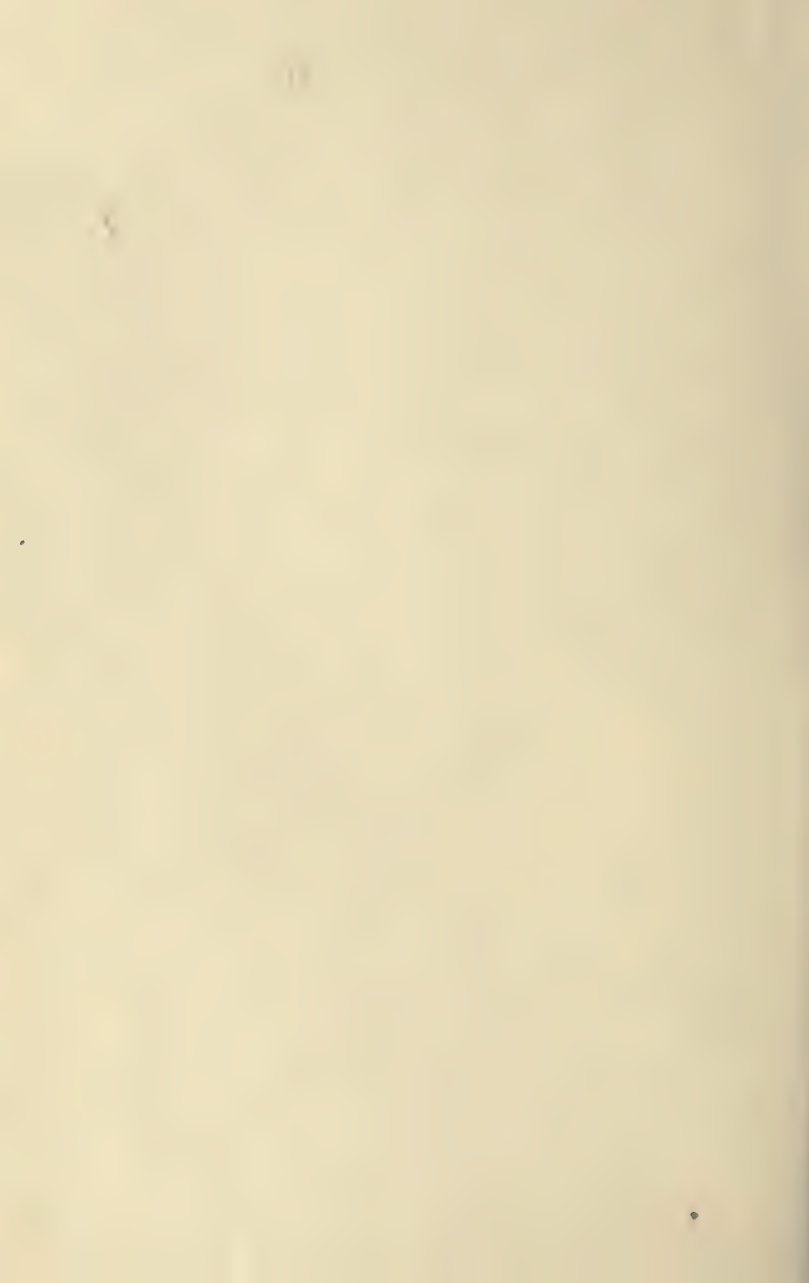
And when the wedding was over, the Countess rode away with her husband to his castle of De Lannes, and her two boys went with her—Raymond, because it was on his road to Paris, and Louis, because he was to be taught to be a knight by Count Hugo, who had admired and loved the boy almost from the first time he had seen him.

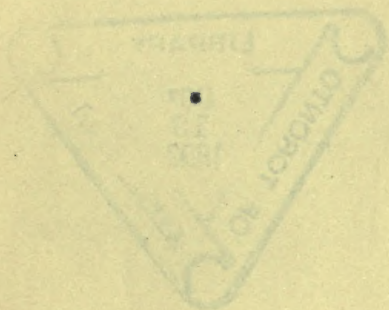
The priests from Paris never came to catechise the Countess. The truth was, that the young King was not so much of a king as he had supposed himself to be; for his mother, Queen Blanche, was not willing that the crown should interfere in any way with the operations of the Inquisition, and had not consented that the priests should be sent to the castle of Barran. But as it became known that the King had taken an interest in the matter, and as it was probably considered unwise to bring a religious prosecution against the wife of the Count de Lannes,—who was not only a powerful nobleman, but a warm supporter of both Church and state, and who was also known to have punished and exterminated the band of *cotereaux* who had attacked the Inquisitorial party,—the matter was suffered to drop, and nothing more was ever heard of it.

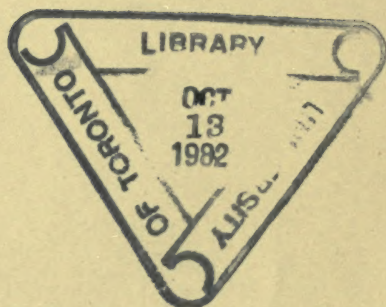
Viteau was left in charge of Bernard, who would faithfully administer its affairs until Raymond should be of age to come and take possession of the establishment and the estates.

And now, as our friends have left the chateau, with whose varying fortunes we have, for a time, been interested, we will leave it also; and the story of Viteau is told.

THE END.







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